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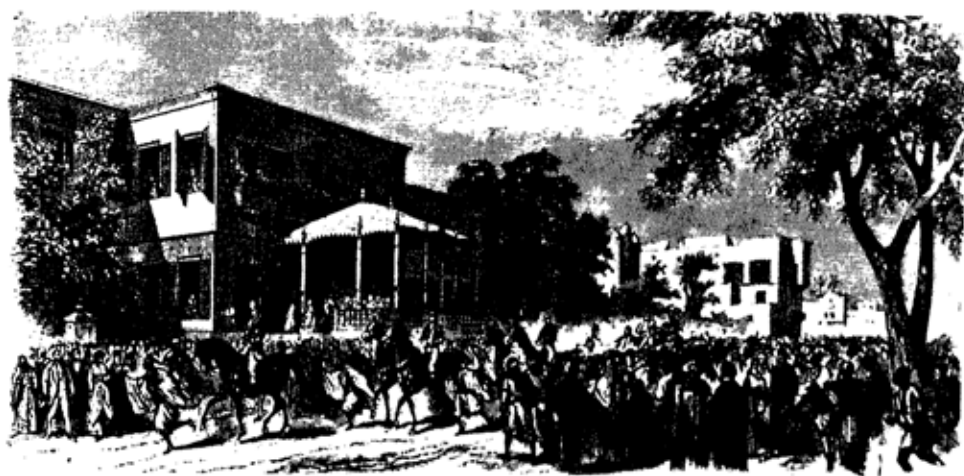




SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL







*The first Shepherd's Hotel in 1863. On the right is 'Kléber's Tree', under which Kléber was assassinated*



*The new Shepherd's in 1957*

NINA NELSON

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# Shepherd's Hotel

*Quis aquam nili bibit aerum bibet*

OLD SAYING

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LONDON  
Barrie and Rockliff

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First published 1960 by  
Barrie & Rockliff  
(Barrie Books Ltd)  
2 Clement's Inn Strand London WC2

Printed in Great Britain by  
Western Printing Services Ltd Bristol

Bound by  
The Pitman Press Bath

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TO  
MY MOTHER









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## Preface

THE first time I walked across the well-known terrace at Shephard's and entered the celebrated hotel I became one of its many devotees; the very marble beneath my feet seemed to be vibrating with atmosphere and from that moment the aura of romance that visitors had noticed for close on a century became real. This was in 1950. For the next two years I kept hearing new facts and new stories about Shephard's—then in 1952 the fabulous building was razed to the ground by fire in a few short hours.

I went to Cairo again in 1956 and visited the site of the old hotel. It had become a vast car park! I felt despondent as I walked between the serried ranks of cars when suddenly I found myself facing Kléber's Tree—quite undamaged! My spirits soared. I knew then I should write a history of Shephard's Hotel.

A book scanning the life of such a place would not be possible without the aid of many of its erstwhile habitués, which space does not permit me to name. My thanks are due to many, not least for personal kindnesses from Muriel Hunter-Brown, Violet Wood and Elizabeth Wigfull.

Thomas Cook and Son Ltd. searched through their archives with excellent results and the assistant general manager Mr. Arthur Turner, went to endless trouble to help me with research. Mr. G. M. Meredith-Owens, of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts at the British Museum, translated an old deed of Shephard's Hotel drawn up in Mohamet Ali's time and given to me by the late Brigadier William Hayes. The B.B.C. and American Express Company Inc. also went through their archives and brought several things to light—as did Mr. Paul Delacave and Mr. Joe Renson of The Shephard's and Egyptian Hotel Company. In addition Mr. Renson sent me several excellent photographs.

I spent happy days in Switzerland listening to Charles Müller, Freddy Elwert—'Freddy of Shepherd's'—and Antoine Focrster talk of their years of 'managing' Shepherd's. And speaking of hotel managers, the late Auguste Wild—'Wild Bey' of the Savoy in Cairo—had many tales to tell.

My thanks are due to Wing-Commander F. C. T. Rowe, Michael Bird—a great grandson of Samuel Shepherd himself—Vincent Galloway, A. G. Mitchell, Colonel Alan Shepherd and his staff at Sandhurst library, W. Basil Benwell Rees—late of Alexandria—Dr. J. R. Jorimann of Zürich, Mahmoud Ahmed Aly of Cairo and Miss H. M. Schotthofer of Washington, without whose help much of the glamour of Shepherd's would have escaped me.

Particularly I would like to thank Brigadier Dudley Clarke who, some years ago, had thought of writing a book about Shepherd's himself—but his boundless energy was diverted elsewhere. He generously gave me the material he had gathered.

Editors and newspaper men gave me every assistance, among them W. R. Todd, assistant foreign manager of the *Sunday Times*, the late Philip Taylor, proprietor-editor of the *Sphinx* magazine in Cairo and J. Frank Diggs military editor of *U.S. News and World Report* in Washington. Walter Bosshard of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, from his eyrie in the Swiss Alps, sent me a most gripping account of Black Saturday. C.A.E. Churchill and Warwick Ronald also related their personal experiences of that dreadful day. At the time of the holocaust travellers the world over could not believe that Shepherd's had gone, and within three years a 'new' Shepherd's emerged from the ashes of the 'old', though on a different site and in modern style. Samuel Shepherd would approve, for his great tradition of hospitality is carried on.

The opening day was one of great rejoicing, a special postage stamp marked the occasion and President Nasser himself attended the inaugural ceremony. Once again world-renowned people stride through the entrance of Shepherd's; Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld, General Wheeler, Dr. Ralph Bunch, General Burns Commander

of the United Nations Emergency Forces, Mr. Eugene Black of the World Bank. The Princes have returned, Prince Feisal of Saudi Arabia and the new young Aga Khan, millionaires, industrialists, ambassadors and tourists. As always East shakes hands with the West at Shepheard's.

The reader will notice that many of the tales which I relate are in dialogue, some as they were told to me, others as I imagine they would have happened. This is to avoid dullness. I naturally cannot vouch for the accuracy of everything in many of the stories I have repeated, but, whenever possible, I have verified my facts; strangely enough with the unfolding of the life at Shepheard's I have found more often than not, that plausible stories turned out to be fiction and what seemed fantastic proved to be true!





# I

## Rendez-vous de l'Élite

'SEE you at Shepheard's.'

'What happens if the rooms are full?'

'They will be—but you must stay at Shepheard's!'

'It may be impossible, what then?'

'Meet me on the terrace for tea and we will arrange something.'

These phrases and innumerable ones like them have been repeated thousands of times and in many languages during the last century. Shepheard's is not only the most famous hostelry in the world—it is an institution. Its site has been changed three times, it has been rebuilt four times and once partially burned down and in 1952 was completely razed to the ground by fire. The hotel's continuity is commemorated by a plaque in the new, spacious entrance hall which reads:

SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL

FOUNDED IN 1841

BY

MR. SAMUEL SHEPHEARD OF PRESTON CAPES

AS THE NEW SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL

AFTERWARDS SHEPHEARD'S BRITISH HOTEL

ON THE SITE ONCE OCCUPIED BY

NAPOLEON'S HEADQUARTERS

---

ENTIRELY REBUILT IN 1891 BY PH. ZECH

ENLARGED IN 1899 – 1904 – 1909 – 1927

BY THE EGYPTIAN HOTELS LTD.

ENTIRELY REBUILT BY SAME IN

1957

This plaque had had pride of place in the 'old' Shepherd's and was salvaged from the rubble and ashes after 'Black Saturday'. Only the last two lines have been added to bring it up to date.

Shepherd's tradition of hospitality has been maintained by the genial ghost of its founder Samuel Shepherd, his cordial warmth pervading the air-conditioned corridors of today as did his welcoming presence in the narrow, candle-lit hallways of one hundred years ago.

Long before holiday seekers had made the Côte d'Azur and the Italian Riviera fashionable, Shepherd's was known as 'The Playground of International Aristocracy'. Before the First World War instead of taking a villa for the season, a suite was booked at Shepherd's Hotel. Even in those days the hotel's past was steeped in history. From its high-ceilinged rooms General Gordon had set forth on his ill-fated mission to Khartoum; Théophile Gautier to watch the opening of the Suez Canal and Stanley on his amazing march through the African jungle to find Emin Pasha.

From its inception Shepherd's became a *rendez-vous* for the famous. Perhaps due to this and its connection with travel to far-off lands, an aura of romance was linked with the name of the hotel and has remained ever since.

Of the countless numbers of travellers to Egypt during recent times, no one of importance—or unimportance—can have failed at least to have had tea at Shepherd's. Practically every world-renowned person has sat at one time or another on the famous terrace. It was a place to see—and on which to be seen. The shallow stone staircase leading to it has been climbed by eminent figures from East and West; crowned heads of Europe, Asiatic princes, oil-magnates, multi-millionaires, film moguls and ordinary tourists. The steps have echoed to the measured pace of naval, military and air force officers from many countries, with the dignified tread of President Theodore Roosevelt returning from an audience with King Fuad, the light footsteps of the elusive Lawrence after one of his desert forays, and the tired gait of Sir Richard Burton after his hair-raising pilgrimage to Mecca.

Expensively shod film stars, conscious of the effect of a good entrance, walked from the top step to the terrace with as much care as would be taken to imprint their footprints in the concrete of Hollywood's Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

The panorama from the palm-fringed terrace never cloyed. The most blasé visitor found it fascinating. Scenes from an Oriental way of life passed in the street below as if on a film screen. Curious eyes behind sunglasses found it incongruous—but intriguing—to watch royalty being bowed towards a marble-topped table near by, while only a few yards distant an Egyptian wedding party meandered on its way. The old mixed with the new. Although taxis replaced the donkey-boys in front of Shepheard's the vignettes of Egyptian life seen from the terrace did not change. The same splendidly robed dragomen, with their innate knowledge of the visitor's wants, waited their turn to show tourists the sights of Cairo. Street vendors, grinning ingratiatingly, extolled the virtues of their unwanted wares from the pavement. Political and funeral processions wended their noisy way along the wide street with the same regularity. Fashionable shops and travel agencies gradually replaced the old buildings on either side of the hotel, but scavenger kites continued to wheel overhead in the vivid blue sky and the sun, as always, shone blissfully downwards.

When driving past Shepheard's, members of Cairene society would glance upward to see which flag was flying above the hotel, for this indicated which head of state was in residence. One bright morning two kings were beneath the famous roof, for King Fuad of Egypt was visiting King Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

One could remain in the hotel for days without noticing the lack of a single amenity. Shepheard's was complete within itself—even to its own post office. Once drawn into its life one took on a chameleon covering and it did not seem strange to walk from the Moorish Hall with its colourful tapestries, deep Persian carpets, arabesque nooks and high, glass-studded dome to study the teleprinter and read the world's latest news; nor to hear a new dance tune played by the tea-time orchestra while being waited on by *safragis* dressed in crimson and gold embroidered jackets and wide.

white pantaloons—as if they had stepped out of the pages of Ali Baba. Asked by her husband what she would like to see on her first night in Cairo, one of Shepherd's guests looked up in astonishment and ejaculated: 'Why! I thought Shepherd's *was* Cairo!'

In a curious way the hotel so dominated Cairo that social life was regulated by its activities. The winter season began when it gave its first dinner-dance and it ended when the great doors and shutters closed for the summer.

The staff was multi-racial and proved how people of different nationalities can get on together when they all work towards the same end. The chefs were usually Italian or French or British. The housekeepers Swiss, the orchestras French or British. The waiters were mostly Egyptian or Sudanese and it was unusual for one of their number to leave before staying a number of years; many of them knew no other life but Shepherd's.

The Long Bar remains in the memories of all who knew it, perhaps because of its atmosphere of *camaraderie*, more usual in a club than a bar. International affairs were discussed over cocktails or S.Bs.—a speciality of Joe, the barman, who nonchalantly continued serving drinks while Shepherd's was burning down. Although plots were hatched, reputations shredded, practical jokes born and dangerous information exchanged, the outward calm was seldom broken, due to the adroit handling of such famed bar-men as Joe and Gasperini.

René Francis<sup>1</sup> writes of the Long Bar as

a curious place, unlike anything else of its kind . . . I doubt if semi-Bohemian is the right word, but then it is hard to know what is the word to apply to a place the atmosphere of which is neither official nor tourist nor Bohemian—not by any means all-inclusive—just something which is comprehensive and unique and unforgettable, quite apart from the rest of Egypt, quite different perhaps from anything of the kind anywhere in the world. The unwritten chronicle of Shepherd's bar contains most of the unwritten history of modern Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> *Egyptian Aesthetics*, Secker, London, 1911.

In one sense Shepheard's became a club. Letters were sent there for those travelling in the Middle East with no fixed address, and there was no lifting of eyebrows if inquiries were made for a message left at the porter's desk months before. Luggage was handed in and remained in the ample basement for years at a time; but when required it was found immediately with unerring instinct. Due to this facility, the basement resembled a mixture of an antique shop and a stock-room. Among the miscellaneous pieces were cricket bats and books of English verse. Everything was as inviolate as in Tutankhamen's tomb. Unclaimed baggage, with large check numbers still attached, dated back through many wars, the owners being long since dead. The charge for the living was modest, a mere two piastres a month. Although bric-à-brac built up year after year, claimed articles left enough room for another bag of golf clubs, a cabin trunk or space for an odd elephant tusk.

Of the adventurous and outstanding soldiers who led charmed lives and called Shepheard's their home, who can forget the unorthodox Colonel Walter Francis Stirling, D.S.O., M.C., who eventually became adviser to King Zog. As one of Lawrence of Arabia's chief staff officers he cheated death by a hair's breadth many times but his unbelievable escape after a scuffle with three men, who fired six bullets at point blank range at him, caused his name to be spoken of in the Mousky with veneration. One Arab admirer was heard to say vehemently: 'Did they think they could kill Colonel Stirling with only six shots!' Stirling always considered Shepheard's his spiritual home when he was in the Middle East and for a long period kept his address of 'Number 1, Shepheard's'.

The most famous jewellery shops pale in comparison when one remembers Mansour's jewellery and antique shop in the main hall of the hotel, with its scintillating gems, the Fabergé masterpieces, *objets de vertu* or the exquisite Egyptian gold filigree work. The shop was a favourite of ex-King Farouk, whose possessions when he abdicated were compared to the contents of Versailles in 1793. Probably the most valuable statuettes bought by Farouk from Mansour were a number of delicate limestone figures wrought

about 1376 B.C. during the reign of Pharaoh Akhnaton, and worth a fortune.

It was said Mansour sold his antiques only to those he liked and often lowered the price to enable the right person to buy a special treasure. His prices were so prohibitive for those he feared would not appreciate his beautiful things that, more often than not, they left his dignified presence empty-handed. If the exorbitant price was forthcoming, Mansour accepted it with equanimity, easing his conscience with the thought that his next customer might be a true lover of antiquities with a small purse.

During the last war, when Mansour was an old man, he bequeathed the shop to the capable hands of his eldest son Edmond.

In 1952, Freddy Elwert, manager of Shepherd's during the thirties, was staying at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in California. He was most surprised to see that the jewellery shop there was called 'Mansour'. Walking in, he found it was owned by Mansour's youngest son, Émile. His delight knew no bounds when he found the old man himself was visiting his son. It was a touching reunion. Mansour was very aged and partially blind, yet he recalled how he had given Freddy Elwert his first Arabic lessons and spoke of the many priceless treasures that had passed through his hands when he was at Shepherd's.

The name of Shepherd's brings back to those who stayed there many different memories of things and people; that great gastronome Charles Müller, with his jovial manner and hearty laugh, who was managing director during the last war and to whom British officers in particular owe a deep debt of gratitude. He was unruffled by any situation and beloved by official and unofficial circles. Those invited to one of Charles's Swiss fondue parties, the repast cooked by his own hands, will recall the delicious aroma of cheese and kirsch which met one on the way to his suite. Then there was the rotund Italian head waiter who had a real enthusiasm for wine and would literally smack his lips when he talked about it, or the *maitre* who had the endearing habit of rubbing one hand round his stomach when describing a particularly delectable menu. The extravagant galas, dancing in

the garden where the trees were threaded with coloured lights, luncheons under the shade of Kléber's Tree, the tinkling fountain in the Grill Room, the small marquee that was sometimes erected leading out of the suite which overlooked the terrace roof, so that the guest within had the illusion of entertaining in a tent as richly carpeted as one belonging to an Arabian prince; but more often it was put up as a splendid awning from which visiting royalty could watch some special procession in front of the hotel. The fantastic, pink alabaster pillars in the ballroom; or the exceptionally magnificent royal palm-tree rising high over the façade of the building, its smooth trunk like chased silver, its giant fronds waving as gracefully as ostrich plumes and casting great pools of shadow on the grass below, which, by a strange quirk of fate, was to survive the 1952 fire.

Shepherd's is mentioned again and again in books. Maurice Dekobra's delightful heroine, Lady Diana Wynham, whose adventures in *La Gondole aux Chimères* have been translated into sixteen languages, chose Shepherd's as the most desirable place to stay and her rich friend, the Countess of Bliss, extracted a promise from her ex-husband that he would never set foot in Shepherd's—where surprising encounters were the rule rather than the exception—as nothing would have displeased her Ladyship more than finding herself face to face with the Duke in his mistress's company at her favourite hotel. The hotel crops up in after-dinner stories, traveller's tales and war reminiscences; this last is not strange when Shepherd's unstinted service to officers during the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, the Boer War and the two great world wars is remembered.

Little did Samuel Shepherd guess that in 1890 Edwin de Leon, the United States Consul in Egypt, would write a sentence that was to be reiterated over and over again: 'Shepherd left behind him a name that is identified with Egypt and with Cairo as closely as it would have been had its owner built a pyramid.'



## 2

### Kléber's Tree

IN the year 1841 Samuel Shephard, an Englishman born in Northumberland, aided a certain Mr. Hill in running the 'British Hotel' in Cairo—a modest establishment in one of the narrow streets near a swampy waste called the Ezbekieh. Before the opening of the Suez Canal, travellers to the Far East had to journey across the desert, and Hill ran small rest houses along this overland route together with another hotel at Suez. He was so pre-occupied with these commitments that he gave Shephard a free hand at the 'British Hotel'. Shephard was a farmer's son and had run away to sea with the proverbial shilling in his pocket. He knew little of hotels, but reorganized the primitive facilities which then existed with a type of genius that was to bring him fame. The establishment was managed so competently that Hill soon relinquished his interest completely, and by 1845 the words 'Shephard's Hotel' had appeared over the entrance.

Fortune smiled on Shephard, for the development of commerce between Europe and the East brought more and more travellers as birds of passage to his hotel, which became a delightful oasis for those who lingered awhile in Cairo and then went on their way. For the wealthy and seasoned travellers, who voyaged to Egypt in reputable ships with their own stores of provisions, it was a haven indeed; and for those less experienced and with little money, who came by cargo boats overrun with rats and cockroaches, who suffered from sea-sickness or whose hunger was not appeased by musty biscuits and salt fish, Shephard's Hotel seemed a paradise.

When travellers disembarked at Alexandria, there was no railway to take them on to Cairo and the journey had to be continued up the Nile. To shorten the route, a canal, some seventy miles

long, had been excavated by order of Mohamet Ali to connect Alexandria with the Rosetta branch of the Nile. It had taken a mere seven months to finish, but the history of its making was tragic. Despite lack of tools and provisions three hundred thousand men of the *corvée*—the forced labour corps—toiled with bare hands at excavations lower than the level of the sea, and some thirty thousand of them died before the work was completed.

Cook's steamers had not yet made their appearance on the Nile and sanitary conditions on the overcrowded river boats were horribly crude. However, discomfort was alleviated by the delightful climate and the adventurous spirit of the voyagers. Unfortunately Harriet Martineau, one of the first intrepid women travellers of those days, left no description of Shephard's Hotel in her famous journal because, when she reached Cairo, she found all the rooms at the hostelry full to overflowing. Nevertheless, she wrote a graphic account<sup>1</sup> of the voyage from Alexandria to Cairo.

The moonlight was glorious; and the whole company of passengers sat or lay on deck, not minding the crowding in their enjoyment of the scene; till the dews became so heavy as to send down all who could find room in the cabins. . . .

Two ladies kindly offered me a place in their inner cabin, where I could lie down and have the benefit of an open window; but the place was too unclean for rest. At 3 a.m. we went aground on a mud bank. I saw the quivering poles of the Arab crew from my window, and was confounded by the noise overhead—the luggage being shifted with all possible outcry. We just floated for a minute and then stuck fast again. By the cessation of the noise, I presently found that the matter was given up till daylight; and I slept for about an hour—a very desirable thing, as these groundings made it appear uncertain whether we should reach Cairo before another night.

When I went on deck, before seven, I found we were opposite Sais. But there was nothing to be done. No one could go ashore; and the best consolation is, that there is nothing to be

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern Life*, Moxon, London, 1895.

seen there by those who can only mourn over the mounds, and not penetrate them. A mob of Arabs was brought down to our aid; and a curious scene was that of our release. On deck our luggage was piled without order; and blankets were stuffed in among trunks and bags. From these blankets emerged one fellow passenger after another, till the set of unshaven and unwashed gentry was complete. In the river was a long line of naked Arabs, tugging and toiling and screaming till the vessel floated . . .

Breakfast was served on deck, under an awning; and greatly was it enjoyed by one of the passengers—a Catholic lady of rank, who was travelling absolutely alone, and shifting for herself very successfully. She helped herself to an entire chicken, every bone of which she picked. While doing so, she was disturbed by waiters passing behind her between the two tables; and she taught them by vigorous punches what it was to interfere with her elbows while they were wanted for cutting up her chicken. Immediately after this feat, she went to the cabin, and kneeled down to her prayers, in the face of as many as chose to see . . .

Travelling conditions were no better for passengers coming in the opposite direction from India and the Far East; and to them also Shepherd's Hotel seemed a paradise where they quickly forgot the inferno of the Red Sea in summer, and the overcrowded, flea-infested horse-coaches which had carried them along the desert track from Suez. On reaching Cairo by the overland route one gentleman recorded:

Those who may have travelled across the Isthmus in summer will recall with gratitude their plunge into the big stone baths in the lower regions of Shepherd's Hotel.

And another compares his room at Shepherd's with the last one he had had in England:

The apartment we sit in is decorated with mysterious arabesque lattices instead of glass windows; ample luxurious

divans, heaped with cushions, replace our stiff chairs and sofas; instead of the roll of coaches and the sound of bells, we hear but the solemn and mournful invocation to prayer from the balcony of some minaret. . . . Every sight and every sound reminds us that we are in the midst of a different race and different manners—associated with our earliest and most romantic impressions.

Modern Cairo was only just coming into existence. Foreign communities and consulates were confined to the Ezbekich district. The gates leading to it were locked each night and the Government declined to take any responsibility for the safety of foreigners left outside. Shepherd's Hotel was in this quarter, close to a small park called Rosetti Gardens. A mosque flanked it on one side and another was directly behind it so that the hotel had a picturesque setting although the rest of the street was hemmed in by private houses. The building was rectangular in shape with a flat roof over which a minaret towered from the mosque on the side. The façade was unadorned save for jutting balconies on the upper story, enclosed by windows of graceful *mashrabiya* work—a type of fine, carved trellis-work.

Each morning, visitors would emerge from the cool interior of the hotel through a plain wooden door which gave straight on to the street, and over which hung a great bronze lantern. Donkeys were hired from the donkey-boys who hung round the entrance and, after much bargaining and gesticulating, a price would be arranged and the patient beasts would be mounted by ladies in full, ample skirts and hats with flowing ostrich plumes escorted by gentlemen in swallow-tail coats and peg-top trousers, who would then ride off unconcernedly through the city's tortuous lanes, pursued by the tireless donkey-boys, perhaps to watch bargaining in the slave market, visit a mosque and shop in the bazaars, or go trotting off to the Pyramids. There were no special guides or dragomen, but everyone was friendly and helpful.

Shepherd, who had only a secretary to help him, let rooms and apartments to people who supplied their own servants. It was a

lucrative business and his establishment was never empty, but he suffered a severe setback when one of the frequent cholera epidemics of the day smote the city. It was of such a virulent kind that it spread from the Middle East to Europe and thousands of people died.

Kinglake was in Cairo during the cholera and left a vivid description of how, far from home in an alien land, he watched the funerals passing his hotel windows.

These funerals were very simply conducted. The bier was a shallow wooden tray carried upon a light wooden frame. The tray had in general no lid, but the body was more or less hidden from view by a shawl or scarf. The whole was borne upon the shoulders of men who hurried forward at a great pace. Two or three singers usually preceded the bier, the howlers (these are paid for their vocal labours) followed after, and last came such of the dead man's friends and relations as could keep up with such a rapid procession, these, especially the women, would get terribly blown and would struggle back into the rear, many fairly 'beaten off'. I never observed any appearance of mourning in the mourners; the pace was too severe for any solemn affection or grief.

When first I arrived in Cairo the funerals that daily passed under my windows were many, but still there were long intervals without a single howl. These intervals became less frequent and shorter, and at last the passing of the howlers from morning to noon was almost incessant. The funerals took place between daybreak and noon and the performances of these people woke me in the early morning and prevented me from remaining in ignorance of what was going on in the streets below.

Nevertheless, despite plagues and war, men still travel to the ends of the earth, and the visitors soon returned once the epidemic abated. Samuel Shepherd quickly regained his financial balance and did so well that he began to look round for larger and more suitable premises.

By 1850 the great Mohamet Ali had died and was replaced by his grandson, Abbas Pasha. Through the British Consul, Sir Charles Murray, Shephard obtained permission from the new Khedive to move into the former Royal Palace of Princess Zeinab, which overlooked the Ezbekieh. When Shephard's plans for the conversion were ready he laid them before Abbas Pasha himself. The Khedive gave his approval and also promised to help financially. The alterations were hurried on and the old palace was gradually turned into an hotel. Despite rebuilding and enlarging, Shephard's was to remain on this site for close on a century.

In 1850 Arnold Bromfield<sup>1</sup> wrote to his sister from Cairo that:

... We passed the Barrage where the Nile is prevented by strong embankments from subsiding in the delta till the land is complete and our approach to Boulak, the port of Cairo, did not take place till 10 p.m. of the 25th.

We landed amidst a confused hubbub of camels, donkeys and vociferous and quarrelsome Arabs and found Mr. Shephard, the proprietor of the hotel at which I am staying, ready, with two or three omnibuses, to whirl us away along an excellent road bordered with thriving acacias to his establishment in this magnificent square, the Ezbekieh, about a mile and a half distance from Boulak.

*November 1st*

This place is immeasurably above Alexandria in point of interest and beauty. From the flat roof of this hotel I have a splendid view of the city with its mosques and minarets and above all conspicuous in the distance to the S.S.W., yet seemingly close at hand, the mighty pyramids of Giza appearing like mountains against a pale blue sky but with my invaluable companion at my side, the telescope, I can bring all the ranges of stone composing them into view. Below me is a waving sea of foliage, from rows of fine acacias, sycamores of scripture and other trees with which the fine esplanade is thickly planted.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from Egypt and Syria*, London, 1856.

... My delight is to mount the roof about sunset and watch the departing rays bringing out the pyramids in stronger and stronger relief as darkness approaches till at length they can just be discerned as two dark masses.

This house is quite modern, indeed almost new, with very thick walls and from the bad clumsy fitting and want of finish about the woodwork and painting (which last is never renewed after the first application) you would suppose the building to be a century old. The room I occupy is a large, airy apartment with white-washed walls, coarsely coloured in fresco below in a sort of imitation of panel wainscoting of a slate colour bordered with dark red brown, above is a sort of fleur-de-lis pattern impressed on the wall in flaming scarlet. The room, which has a southern aspect, is nearly square of about 24 feet, and has an alcove roof pierced in an open pattern, displaying neither taste nor style in design. Three very large glazed windows nearly fill up the front side, which looks on the Ezbekieh, and immediately below them runs a raised stone dado, covered with luxurious cushions of blue printed calico, with window curtains to match. These and a light iron bedstead with mosquito curtains of fine muslin etc. complete the furniture of my domicile—which is very comfortable at this season but I suspect must prove cold in the winter.

The charges are 40 piastres per diem, six shillings and eightpence if by the week, and 50 piastres or eight shillings and fourpence for a less time. This includes lodging and board which includes the most substantial breakfasts at 8.30, lunch with fruit at 1 o'clock and dinner (excellent) at 6.30 with a cup of coffee after, but no tea unless required, and then it is extra. . . . For five piastres a day or a shilling you can hire a donkey for the whole day.

The foundations of Shepherd's Hotel rested on ground which had known pageantry and violence in the past. Tradition has it that during the ninth century Touloun's splendid royal estate sprawled over it and beyond the Ezbekieh. Touloun's son, Homarouiah,

spent his lifetime embellishing the gardens further. The parkland was set out with fine trees and tropical foliage. Flower beds of fantastic patterns—some in the form of writing—were a riot of exotic colours. Rare date-bearing palms of stunted growth were cultivated so that the fruit could be plucked from a sitting or standing position. Royal palm-trees with long, silvery trunks were not considered exotic enough so were gilded with goldleaf or encased in cylinder-shaped coverings of brass. Aviaries of gaily plumaged birds filled the flower-perfumed air with singing. The royal wives strolled along mosaic paths and paused to look at magnificent fountains, or to watch their lord and master lolling in an air-filled leather bed on a pool of quicksilver. The quicksilver was contained in a gigantic basin and the soft leather bed was secured to the sides by silken bands threaded through silver rings. The bed undulated as Homarouiah threw sweetmeats to his pet lion or shouted laughing remarks to his courtiers. The sun, which caused the gems to glitter in the crowns of the royal wives, was kept off the august presence by high, silken screens. Homarouiah suffered from insomnia but found rocking in his remarkable bed lulled him to sleep. The quicksilver pool was described as vying 'with any luxury ever created for regal splendour'.

Time demolished even such royal trappings as these and no more is heard of the site until 1771 when Ali Bey, one of the slave mameluke rulers, commissioned a magnificent harem built over the spot.

Ali Bey was a man of violence. He plotted against the Sultan of Constantinople, who nipped the conspiracy in the bud by dispatching an assassin to Egypt with orders not to return without Ali Bey's head. Discovering the plot, Ali Bey had the would-be slayer killed, marched against the reigning Pasha of Egypt and declared Egypt independent.

Unlike most mameluke rulers Ali Bey was not content to wallow in riches or build new palaces in exotic surroundings. He was a warrior at heart and, thinking he had destroyed Turkish rule in Egypt for all time, went campaigning—like the Pharaohs of old—into Arabia and Syria. He met an untimely death at the hand of one of his favourites who poisoned him.



The harem buildings of Ali Bey vanished during the recurrent fighting between the Turks and the Egyptians. From the ruins rose another palace, belonging once again to a mameluke ruler, the illustrious Elfi Bey. The new and spacious building and its surrounding parkland stretched to the northern corner of the Ezbekieh. At the rising of the Nile, water inundated the land from the 'Beket-el-Ez'—the Lake of the Ez—from which the name Ezbekieh is derived.

Ultimately, the palace of Elfi Bey became a government building and was commandeered by Napoleon for his headquarters after the Battle of the Pyramids.

Violence, in the form of revolt, stalked the French as it had those who had lived on the same site before them, and it was from here that Napoleon crushed an uprising among the people before he continued his campaign into Syria. He left General Kléber as Commander-in-Chief at his battle-scarred headquarters.

Napoleon wished not only to conquer Egypt and withhold it from the British, but referred to it as 'the most important country in the world'. His imagination was fired by the Egyptian Biblical and Pharaonic antiquities and his personal retinue included painters, historians, engineers, archaeologists and other specialists. He was interested particularly in the almost legendary monastery of Saint Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Saint Catherine's was built by command of the Emperor Justinian in A.D. 520. When it was completed, the emperor discovered that it was militarily unsound—missiles could be thrown from the towering mountain above it—and the architect and others responsible were executed. Save for this stern measure, no violence has ever been connected with Saint Catherine's. Up to the present day, the monastery has never been attacked and the monks have lived there through the centuries in peace. The wells near by have never dried up, and a small green valley beside the monastery has continued to thrive.

An expedition was arranged for two of Napoleon's archaeologists that they might visit Saint Catherine's. The journey across the burning desert was uneventful. When they reached the monastery,

the friendly monks were only too ready to show their holy treasures; among them a casket containing the bones of Saint Catherine, who had been martyred at Alexandria, priceless illuminated manuscripts, the Well of Jethro, where Moses met Ziporah, and in a small chapel within the precincts an altar on the site of Moses' burning bush. Candles had been burning there for more than 1,300 years. Outside in the sunshine, by the chapel walls, the Frenchmen examined a thriving tree with awe. It had been grown from one of the original roots taken from beneath the altar.

Napoleon had left Cairo by the time his two archaeologists returned. They reported disquieting news to General Kléber. Recent floods, exceptional in the desert, had swept down the mountainside to the ramparts of Saint Catherine's and had undermined the eastern wall. As it happened, the religious community was in a state of decadence, the worst for many a century, for six monks only were in residence. General Kléber took time off from his military duties to see what could be done.

He ordered blocks of granite similar to those used by Justinian in the original building, and dispatched a number of masons from Cairo to repair the damage. So Kléber became associated in the minds of the monks at Saint Catherine's with the preservation of Moses' burning bush—but there was to be yet another tree in Kléber's life.

The tide was turning against the French. Napoleon arranged to meet Kléber at Rosetta. Instead, he secretly left Egypt. Kléber was more than enraged when he discovered the ruse and had no alternative but to return to Cairo, where he assumed complete command of the French army. He began negotiations in order to evacuate his troops from Egypt and, after countless meetings with representatives of the Turks and the British, it was arranged that he should withdraw his men with honour. When this became known, a levy of gold was hurriedly collected from the Cairo masses to hasten the French departure.

But the British commander, Sir Sydney Smith, had exceeded his powers by granting the French army permission to leave, and

the British Government insisted on its surrender. This blow to French prestige left Kléber no choice but to fight.

While gazing out over the swampy waste of the Ezbekieh from his rooms, Kléber made a plan. One moonless night he led his men to ancient Heliopolis (now part of Cairo) and made a surprise attack on the Turks. His arms triumphed and the French marched exultantly back to Cairo. Joy was short lived however, for on their return they found their headquarters had been besieged. Two days of fierce fighting followed before Kléber could recapture the residence.

There was an uneasy lull. Walking in the garden at his headquarters a few weeks later, Kléber was himself attacked. An assassin crept out of a well and, using the shadow of a sycamore-tree as a screen, struck the General from behind with a dagger. Kléber sank to the ground crying to his guard: 'A moi, Guide. Je suis blessé.' In a few moments all was over, for the blow was fatal.

Outside France Kléber was to be remembered down through the years, not so much for having served as Napoleon's right hand in Egypt, nor because of his distinguished army career, but because of two trees. The monks of Saint Catherine's monastery revered his memory for sustaining their desert fortress in its hour of need and thus protecting Moses' burning bush, while the sycamore in Shepherd's Hotel garden, which became known as 'Kléber's Tree', remained a silent witness to the General's violent death. A plaque bearing his name was placed on the trunk to be read by generations of visitors from all over the world.

There is a story that two tourists, walking down the Avenue Kléber in Paris on their way to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, looked up at the name of the street. Seeing 'Avenue Kléber' on the white plaque above them, one said in a puzzled voice: 'I seem to know that name.' The other replied: 'Of course you do. It's the name of a species of Egyptian tree. We saw one in the garden of Shepherd's Hotel.'

Few trees have had such a variety of sounds spiralling among their branches as Kléber's Tree. The noise of riots and fighting,

the brittle chatter of society folk, laughter, love-making, whispered confidences, heated debates and conspiratorial plots—most alarming of all, perhaps, was to be the crackle of the flames in 1952.

Not long after Kléber's assassination, the Ezbekieh swamp was drained by command of Mohamet Ali. Paths criss-crossed the resulting green and a new 'square' emerged, planted with trees and flowers. The decaying French headquarters was renovated and opened as a school of languages. In time, Mohamet Ali transformed the school into a palace and presented it, together with the surrounding gardens, to one of his daughters, the Princess Zeinab. Under the aegis of the Princess the palace was changed into a religious institution.

A Turkish deed, a copy of which is in the possession of the writer, allows Shephard's Hotel, subject to certain safeguards, to occupy the land surrounding its site, though it was a *waqf* (a pious bequest for charitable purposes) of the Princess's and others of Mohamet Ali's family.

By the time Samuel Shephard had converted the religious institution into an hotel, a wide street ran between it and the new Ezbekieh Square, where coffee-shops had sprung into existence. Visitors crowded into these cafés, listened to outdoor concerts and strolled along the paths bordered with trees and shrubs. Every nationality, rich and poor, walked in the square. It was not unusual to see a Frankish lady in the latest Paris hat making way for an urchin on donkey-back or a pack of half-wild dogs. The whole area was surrounded by a low canal with grassy banks; shepherds watered their flocks, as they had in the days of the Bible, while they watched, wide-eyed, the passing throng: Turks garbed in bright, rich silks, glossy negroes in long white robes and vermilion turbans, quick-witted Greeks, Jewish money-lenders, handsome Egyptians and fashionable tourists. It was impossible in such a setting to believe that the arid desert was but a few miles distant.

Shephard's Hotel flourished. Gone were the days of letting apartments while guests brought their own servants. Samuel Shephard had trained a staff to help him and engaged the

services of a certain Luigi Steinschneider as head waiter. A private parlour on the ground floor could be engaged for an extra pound over and above the ten shillings charged for board and lodging per day, while there was a special pension rate for those who stayed several weeks.

The food Luigi placed with royal aplomb before the guests was extremely good. Breakfast consisted of ham and eggs, fried potatoes, cutlets, cold meats, home-made jams, fruit and tea or coffee. Other meals were equally varied. Some twenty to fifty persons sat down for the table d'hôte at 6.30 each evening. They discussed the advantages of the large cool passages, the lofty ceilings and the excellent way Mr. Shepherd saw to their wants.

Shepherd let nothing interfere with the smooth running of his hotel. It was always foremost in his thoughts and his wife and family bowed their will to this, his first love. Nor did friendship with the Khedive and acquaintanceship with some of the most notable people of the day go to his head: he remained an astute business man and added to the income from his hotel by obtaining the contract for victualling the British regiments on the way to, or returning from, India.

In the meantime the number of tourists coming to Egypt increased each year. Many came to see the ancient monuments of the Pharaohs, others to regain their health, but most travellers wished to catch a glimpse of the life of the mysterious East.

The dragoman came into being and there were carriages and coachmen for hire. A carriage and pair normally cost one pound a day though, if booked through Mr. Shepherd, it could be procured for sixteen shillings. The fee included a *sais* who wore picturesque attire: a tight cotton jacket with large loose sleeves caught together behind with a piece of cord so that they flapped when he ran, a short, baggy kilt and coloured wools wound round his bare ankles—these last, it was believed, enabled him to run more quickly. He held a small stick with which to clear the way as he ran before the carriage. The dragoman, in a long silken robe, sat on the box with the coachman. Altogether it was a colourful equipage.

For visitors who belonged to the Anglican Church a service was held each Sunday morning in the drawing-room of a spacious house near Shephard's. The size of the congregation fluctuated, depending on how many guests were staying in the hotel. Shephard's became a *rendez-vous* after church for both travellers and Cairo residents. Florence Nightingale wrote home to England that during her first Sunday in Cairo 'there was such a shaking and bowing after church and at Shephard's Hotel'.

Shephard believed in the adage 'First come, first served'. When omnibuses and carriages disgorged newcomers at the entrance, they rushed quickly up the steps to engage the best rooms before their fellows, while the habitués looked on with amusement.

Turnbull's shop in Frank Street was in special demand for buying such food supplies as tea, sugar, jam, arrowroot, syrup, lemonade, rice and pickles for trips to Upper Egypt. Crates and boxes of food were bought by the visitors and would accumulate along the wide stone passages of Shephard's Hotel, together with piles of saddles and other travelling gear, while negotiations were going on to engage private *dahabiehs*.

Sightseers in Cairo continued to plunge unconcernedly on donkey-back through the labyrinth of narrow streets. From harem windows of beautifully carved wooden lattice-work, Egyptian women watched the prying scrutiny of the tourists without themselves being seen. The newcomers saw buildings with successive stories overhanging one another, so high and close together that the cramped streets were almost dark. There was scarcely room for a loaded camel to pass by.

W. E. Bartlett in his book *The Nile Boat*<sup>1</sup> wrote:

An encounter with one of these animals is anything but agreeable. Sometimes he is laden with water-skins, wet and dripping upon the earth, sometimes with baskets of large square stones, and, what is worst of all, with long dangling beams of timber which droop down and scrape the walls on either side

<sup>1</sup> Hall, Virtue & Co., London, 1846.

... passengers accommodate themselves to the camel's gyrations as best they are able—not to be affected without much dexterity, and withal an occasional tumble.

Visitors put up with such inconveniences for the novelty of the sights.

Beggars, resignation stamped on their faces, wrung the hearts of the tourists. They were treated with respect and generosity by the Moslems. Many were blind. Glaucoma was more prevalent than poverty—so common in fact that the *fellaheen* had thought nothing in Mohamet Ali's time of depriving a son of an eye to avoid conscription under his iron hand. The custom increased until it became notorious—whereupon Mohamet Ali formed a one-eyed corps!

The bazaars drew Shepherd's visitors like a magnet. What was to become the famous Mousky then consisted of a long avenue running through the city, intersected by narrow lanes which were so overhung with awnings that they were in constant twilight. Each trade had its own quarter or *khan*—some minute, others large with great courtyards to receive merchandise.

In A.D. 1400 the Emir Akhor-el-Khaliy had commanded that the cemetery of the Fatimid Khalifs should be excavated and the bones of the usurpers thrown outside the city walls. The Fatimids had chosen the centre of the city for their burial ground and when the Emir turned the magnificent site into a *khan* as a place of business for the wealthy merchants of the day, the Khan-el-Khaliy became, and still is, the most famous part of the Mousky. It is intersected with tiny streets where the visitor can buy carpets, brocades, silks, leatherwork, precious stones, alabaster, amber and all kinds of hand-worked copperware. Every second shop seems to be a goldsmith or silversmith, all of whom sell the most exquisite filigree work. On public auction days the entrances to the *khan* were chained off to prevent animals and carriages getting in. The whole bazaar district was protected by locked gates at night like the Ezbekieh quarter. During the day it was so crowded there was a constant *frou-frou* of sound as people brushed by each other;

and, when the merchants grew tired of selling their wares they sat on small mats and smoked cherry-wood pipes hung with tassels and fringes of silk, or—through a flexible tube in a glass bowl—the more pretentious *narghileh*, looking as serene in the mêlée as if completely alone. Waterboys hung round every corner, their cries and the clack-clack of their small copper saucers mingling with the voices of other vendors, while servants shouted: 'Make way for my lord!' as they brandished short sticks to cleave a path for their masters through the living mass.

Cairo, cradled between the towering yellow Mokattam hills and the Pyramids of Giza, was everything Shepheard's visitors had been led to believe. The city was filled with magic at evening when the sun sank behind these mighty edifices, flooding the sky with a rich golden light that coloured the arabesque fretwork of the buildings with saffron. Countless minarets rose upwards, the highest of all being the four—hundreds of feet tall—crowning Saladin's Citadel on top of one of the Mokattam crags. A muezzin's small white figure appeared at sunset on each minaret and their voices joined together in a swelling trill of sound calling the faithful to prayer. As darkness cloaked the streets, the mosques were illuminated by scrolled lamps of glass and bronze and appeared to float in the soft night air.

What the visitors thought of Cairo and Shepheard's Hotel was recorded before they left in a Visitors' Book. This had been bought by the enterprising Samuel Shepheard in 1849. It was bound in thick brown leather and in it his guests and the excursionists who journeyed up the Nile wrote their signatures, the names of their sailing-ships and the description of their flags. The pages were to contain some funny remarks, many enthusiastic compliments and a few harsh complaints. The book was complemented by another, more luxurious, of tooled leather with gilded edges and a tiny padlock, in which royal personages and famous people signed their names. Christened the 'Golden Books', they were to become the most fascinating records in the annals of hotel-keeping. Later, unfortunately, they were destroyed by fire during the 1952 riots.



At the early age of forty years, Samuel Shepherd decided to retire. He had accumulated a modest fortune and wished to return to England with his family and enjoy it. In 1861 he sold his hotel for £10,000 to a Bavarian hotel-keeper from Alexandria, M. Philip Zech.

### 3

## The Opening of the Suez Canal

IN 1863 Ismail Pasha succeeded his uncle, Said Pasha, on the Khedival throne. He was generous and recklessly extravagant in his personal life, but he also spent enormous sums of money on public works and these included, once again, the improvement of Ezbekieh Square. Enclosed within its present limits, it was renamed Ezbekieh Gardens and laid out afresh with formal gardens, grottoes, fountains and modern cafés. Ismail had the main thoroughfares broadened, among them Ibrahim Pasha Street which ran in front of Shepheard's and continued through the Coptic Quarter to the old Bab-el-Hadeen Gate, where the station stands today. Building-plots round the new Ezbekieh Gardens were eagerly bought up by speculators and those closest to Shepheard's were the most expensive.

It became customary for Cairo residents to join the cosmopolitan gathering at Shepheard's each Christmas Day. Everyone attended church in the morning and after a light luncheon went on various excursions; either to the mounds of 'Old Cairo' to look for beads, to the sphinx and pyramids or donkey-riding in the desert.

In the evening the hotel provided the traditional Christmas dinner which M. Zech, assisted by his manager Mr. Gross and the incomparable Luigi, endeavoured to make a worthy repast.

The guests in 1863 included many outstanding people; Count Esterhazy, Baron and Baroness Malorite, the eccentric but brilliant conversationalist General Maryatt, Grant Bey just returned from a successful African expedition during which he and Speke had discovered the headwaters of the Nile—and Sir Richard Burton, who was to astonish the literary world a few months later with his controversial translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

A copy of a bill from Mr. Zech to a Mr. Mosley that Christmas reads:

	£	s.	d.
November 25th to December 12th	3	9	0
December 14th to 23rd December	5	8	0
Washing		1	3
	8	18	3

Shepherd's Hotel was partially destroyed by fire in 1869, but happily the Golden Books survived, as did the stables of Napoleon's time, which were still in an excellent state of repair. The establishment was hurriedly rebuilt in the same year but with various improvements and the addition of a long annexe and another story. Beautiful gardens always surrounded the hotel which rose once more in the form of a hollow square enclosing, like many oriental palaces, a magnificent courtyard planted with palms and flowering trees. Two small sphinxes were brought from the Temple of Seraphis at Memphis to flank the front doorway, from which the balcony—closer to the ground than the terrace which was to succeed it—juttied outwards and was covered by an awning supported by slender pillars.

A coloured print of this balcony shows people leaning out of the windows to watch an important gentleman driving by in a smart turn-out. Black Circassian horses with outriders dressed in frock-coats and buskins precede the open carriage, while bare-footed *saises* run on either side to clear the way with long sticks. The *saises* wear decorative uniforms: white voluminous pantaloons kept in place by blue cummerbunds, scarlet waistcoats embroidered with gold and red skull-caps topped with blue tassels. Another print shows a military band marching by preceded by a man scattering water over the road from a large water-skin so that the dust might not rise and offend the nostrils of those watching from Shepherd's veranda.

It was about this time that an Englishman, Thomas Cook, the pioneer of organized travel, realized a long-cherished dream by visiting the Middle East. The fact that the Biblical lands had been

places of pilgrimage since the days of the Crusaders had fired his imagination and he decided to investigate the possibility of sending British tourist parties to Egypt and Palestine.

In the past, the majority of people in Britain had not ventured far from their own town or village, but with the advent of railways in England the desire for travel became contagious. In 1841, Thomas Cook had organized an excursion by train from Leicester to Loughborough. The experiment, as it was then, proved so successful that he decided to develop this particular form of enterprise. He gradually extended the scope of his operations and by 1865 they had assumed such proportions that he removed his business from Leicester to London. The urge to travel permeated the air to such a degree that many who had moved from place to place in the British Isles for the first time, now dreamed of visiting far-off lands, but when confronted with the seemingly insurmountable problems of crossing frontiers, speaking foreign languages and using strange currency, they decided the game was not worth the candle. Only the true adventurer and the wealthy—willing to pay for safe conduct—went abroad for pleasure. Luggage was formidable and escorts were considered necessary for protection.

Thomas Cook sensed the awakening desire to travel farther afield. He arranged more ambitious journeys to the Continent and started a system of international tickets and the 'return fare'. When the middle classes realized they would have no language or money difficulties and that the indefatigable Thomas Cook would see to everything, they swarmed to book tickets for his expeditions. Soon royal personages were to do the same thing.

In 1868, after consolidating various continental travelling enterprises, Thomas Cook set out for Constantinople, Beirut, Jaffa, Alexandria and Cairo. He returned to England well satisfied. He had explored the tourist potentialities of the Middle East and found they were far greater than he had dared to hope. Cairo was to be the focal point; and he appointed an assistant at Shepherd's Hotel—this agreement was the beginning of an association of Cook's name with Shepherd's which has existed ever since.

The following season Cook personally conducted a tour of thirty-two people to Egypt. He hired two of the Khedive's steamers which enabled his tourists to voyage up the Nile to the borders of the Sudan. On their return to Cairo they stayed at Shepherd's.

Of that period Cook was to write later:

Egypt and Palestine constitute the two greatest features in our present programme; but the countries through which we pass to get here, and the places to be visited on our return journey, all contribute to the general interest of a programme covering about 7,000 miles of travel. . . . I said that Egypt and Palestine constitute the two great features of the tour, and a few words on each may not be unacceptable. After briefly scanning Alexandria, which is a sort of Oriental-European conglomerate, with but few attractions, we hastened on to the capital of modern Egypt—Cairo—which presents a combination of ancient orientalism with Parisian innovations.

Following Thomas Cook's suggestions for headgear, Shepherd's guests adopted a variety of hats to withstand the brilliant sunshine.

Among the articles of REAL use are helmets, shady or other hats, with pugarees of muslin to protect the head and neck from the sun; also light-coloured umbrellas strong enough to be used as walking-sticks. Some difference of opinion exists as to the form of head covering. Some think helmets or solar topees indispensable, but this is not accepted universally, and ladies do not greatly favour them, as they are difficult to fit and uncomfortable to wear. Many are satisfied with good wide-awakes or 'Terai' hats, and not a few think by far the best of all is a broad-brimmed sailor hat from Andres in Bond Street. All ladies should be provided with thin gossamer veils of brown, blue or green, which are an immense comfort and great protection against sand, dust or glare.

The year 1869 was famous in Egypt for the opening of de

Lesseps's great engineering feat—the Suez Canal. It was the year after Thomas Cook's exploratory trip to Egypt and he was one of the guests invited by Ferdinand de Lesseps for the inauguration of the new waterway. The two travel visionaries had become friends.

The Empress Eugénie came from France to declare the Suez Canal open. She had always paid great attention to de Lesseps's scheme and had awakened the interest of the Emperor, Napoleon III. De Lesseps thought of the Empress, who was also his cousin, as his guardian angel, and the first meeting of the canal shareholders was held on the 15th November—the Feast of Saint Eugénie.

With an impressive entourage and magnificent clothes, Eugénie captivated Cairo. The city was *en fête* in her honour. A road was specially constructed so that she could be driven from the heart of Cairo to see the Pyramids of Giza, and at their base a chalet was built to house the Empress and her suite for a single night. Eugénie thought the great monuments were magnificent and was delighted that as darkness fell, instead of a fireworks display to celebrate her visit, magnesium flares were used to illuminate the Pyramids.

Eugénie, as guest of the Khedive, resided at the Ghezireh Palace, a splendid building surrounded by ornamental gardens and flowing fountains. Ismail had commanded that her private apartments should be an exact replica of her suite at the Tuilleries so that she might 'feel at home'.

It was the most sumptuous season Cairo had yet known. Shepherd's was crowded and added to the usual visitors were eminent people who arrived to take part in the Suez Canal celebrations—among the latter was Théophile Gautier, perhaps the most influential writer and poet of the day, and he left a vivid account of the hotel at this period.

Although Gautier had been to the Middle East several times, this was his first visit to Egypt. Unfortunately, he had broken his left arm and dislocated his shoulder by a fall between decks during the voyage. However, he forgot his disability as soon as he arrived

at the station in Cairo where his romantic fancy was titillated by all that he saw. Almost before he could look round at the laden camels and donkeys, at the polyglot collection of porters, servants and dragomen, all screaming, gesticulating, running and bustling about, a gleaming open carriage from Shepherd's drew up and he was handed in by a uniformed coachman while a *sais* cleared a way through the *mêlée* for his short drive to the hotel.

Heads turned curiously as the famous Frenchman made his way among the wicker sofas and chairs on the veranda to the front door, where he was joyfully received by the manager, Mr. Gross. He was led upstairs and shown into a large, well-furnished room. In the centre of the rug-strewn floor were single beds enveloped in mosquito-netting. A large window overlooked the Ezbekieh and, as Mr. Gross opened the shutters, Gautier saw an enchanting view. The formal rose-gardens were a riot of yellows and reds and clumps of mimosa-trees were in full bloom. Large palm fronds cast black shadows on the pathways and the air was so crystal clear that, far away to the left, Gautier could discern other palm-trees against a skyline of roofs and domes, while to the right slender minarets, their turrets rose-tinted by the sinking disc of the sun, soared into a cobalt-blue sky. On the far horizon the yellow Mokattam hills, devoid of vegetation, stood like a stage backdrop.

Although Cairo beckoned, Gautier's disability necessitated a few days' rest before venturing forth to see the sights—but he found plenty to interest him at Shepherd's. There were many places on the veranda where, armed with binoculars, he could see what was going on round him without himself being seen. He watched the constant parade in front of the hotel, and found it fascinating. Colours were vibrant in the bright sunlight and dancing rays glinted on the gold inlay of swords, on the polished silver tops of canes, on bracelets and anklets and on the rich embroidery of oriental costumes.

The hordes of donkeys and donkey-boys in front of Shepherd's seemed to increase as season succeeded season. Gautier was told there were at least eighty thousand donkeys in Cairo; and

although this may have been a gross exaggeration, he wrote that the noise made by those that did exist gave credence to the myth.

At the end of each day there was a great commotion on the veranda and a hubbub of noise from the pavement as hotel-guests returned from their day's excursions and excitedly told each other where they had been and what they had seen. Meanwhile, conjurers and snake-charmers were busily packing up after their final performances and tourists and guides made plans for the morrow. Carriages for hire drove away from the shade of the trees on the opposite side of the road followed by the donkey-boys. Above the tumult a gigantic Chinese gong was sounded within the hotel to announce that the time for dinner was approaching. Still talking of the places and things they had seen, the visitors went to their rooms to change for dinner.

Gautier found the food to his liking; though cooked in the French manner, he described it as 'lightly English'. The wine-waiter could produce excellent French Bordeaux, German hock and English beer. With white-gloved hands, servants served the various courses deftly and quietly. The Frenchman was interested to note how each evening guests with similar interests and professions separated into groups for their meal. When the ladies retired at the end of dinner, the men intermingled to enjoy coffee and cigars or, putting their elbows on the tables, relaxed and talked about the affairs of the day.

The dining-room gradually emptied as the night wore on, and the gentlemen either continued their conversations on the veranda or strolled across the Ezbekieh for a short constitutional before going to bed.

Gautier's arm was healing and the manager saw to it that he had every comfort and attention. Some weeks after Gautier had returned to France Mr. Gross received the following letter:

Pendant un séjour de plus de six semaines j'ai trouvé à l'Hôtel Shepheard les soins les plus intelligents, les attentions les plus délicates et tout le confort possible qui ont hâté beaucoup



la convalescence d'une blessure grave. Dans cette maison hospitalière j'ai pu croire que j'étais chez moi et je remercie le Directeur de ce bel établissement non pas en étranger mais en ami.

Théophile Gautier.

The annoyance caused by Gautier's broken arm had been dispelled early during his stay at Shepherd's by the unexpected arrival of one of his friends from Paris, Comte Joseph Primoli. When the two men went out together on various excursions, Primoli caused as much turning of heads on the balcony as did Gautier, for he had taken heed of Thomas Cook's advice and wore a pale blue transparent veil over his face to ward off the strong sunlight.

A magnificent banquet was given at Shepherd's for the Empress Eugénie. The Empress was considered the most beautiful woman in Europe and her entrance into the lavishly decorated dining-room must have been the highlight of the hotel's season that year, when it seemed most of France's outstanding personalities had passed through Shepherd's welcoming portals. Certainly word got about, almost before the banquet began, that she was in the hotel and crowds gathered and waited outside the entrance in the hope of catching a glimpse of the peerless Eugénie as she left.

Heads of governments continued to arrive to take part in the Suez celebrations. The Royal Opera House, close by Shepherd's, had been built especially for the occasion. Authorized by Ismail, built of fine Lebanese wood and plaster, it had been completed within six months and was of the same dull apricot colour as Shepherd's. Inside, the hangings were of crimson and gold brocade and the boxes were scrolled with gilt. Harem boxes were fronted with silken screens; and behind the curved proscenium lay an unusually large stage.

The French Egyptologist, Mariette Bey, Director of Egyptian Antiquities, had been requested by the Khedive to find a suitable Pharaonic tale that would be dramatic and lend itself to opera.

Verdi was commissioned to write the music. The result was *Aïda*. There was only one fly in the ointment: the opera was not finished in time for the Suez Canal celebrations as is generally believed, and Verdi substituted *Rigoletto* for the inaugural performance. Nevertheless, it was a grand affair and Eugénie, seated between the Khedive and Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria, gazed down from the royal box on an auditorium filled to overflowing with bejewelled women and splendidly uniformed men. Thunderous applause greeted the final curtain. The opening night was a tremendous success.

A few days later the Empress, once again by the Khedive's invitation, went on a voyage up the Nile to Upper Egypt. She visited the great temples of Luxor and Karnak, the ancient city of Thebes, the Colossi of Memnon and the temples of Deir-el-Bahri, Medinet Habu and the Ramesseum. Eugénie thoroughly enjoyed her trip and returned to Cairo more radiant than ever. After a brief respite in the capital she left by special train for Alexandria where she boarded the Royal French yacht *Aigle* and proceeded to Port Said, for it was November and the time was drawing near for the actual opening of the artificial waterway.

In the meantime, Gautier and other guests of the Khedive residing at Shephard's, made their way to Port Said where they were met and taken to special luxurious tents erected on the banks of the Sweet Water Canal, close to de Lesseps's chalet.

Port Said was a hive of activity. Beflagged ships of all kinds and many nationalities were assembled in the harbour basin. On the 13th November the Khedive arrived in the yacht *Maroussah*. Arab Princes and the Prince and Princess of the Netherlands were invited aboard to a lavish banquet. The Emperor Francis Joseph arrived the following day with an entourage of ministers and his ambassador to Turkey. The frigate *Herta* steamed into harbour on the 16th November with Crown Prince Frederick William of Prussia. Finally a volley of gunfire announced the arrival of the *Aigle* and, as she nosed her way through a fleet of over one hundred ships, Eugénie smilingly acknowledged cheering crews from the poop deck, while small craft packed with sightseers plied their

way back and forth among the larger ships. Along the foreshore newly erected wooden platforms could be seen. Farther inland numerous shacks had been hastily constructed to house some of the thousands of people who had come to watch the spectacle. One thousand servants and five hundred cooks had been brought from Europe to look after the distinguished guests.

Near tragedy was averted when an unusually high tide threatened to swamp the wooden platforms along the banks. Workmen were hurriedly rushed to the spot and an artificial sandbar was created to hold back the swirling water. Before de Lesseps had had time to breathe a sigh of relief further disquieting news was brought to him. During the final soundings a fifteen-foot boulder had been discovered in the path of the canal. He immediately ordered divers to go to the place with kegs of dynamite. It was a gamble, for had the blasting damaged the wall of the canal the next day's sailing would have had to be postponed. More by luck than good judgement the hard stone was blown up without harming the banks.

At last a signal was given for the ceremonies to begin. Led by Ismail's Master of Ceremonies to a central pavilion on the foreshore, the distinguished guests were received by de Lesseps. Sunlight scintillated on colourful uniforms edged with gold braid, scimitars and swords studded with gems, glorious jewels and embroidered satin gowns.

After the reception, the dignitaries gathered on the platforms to watch the blessing of the new waterway. Organ music swelled out over the silent crowds while the Grand Mufti of Cairo gave his benediction, after which the canal was blessed in turn by ecclesiastics of the Coptic, Greek and Catholic Churches, then, amid cheers, the heads of state made their way to small decorated boats which waited to return them to their respective yachts.

That night there was great rejoicing in the town of Port Said and the crowds talked of nothing except the sailing of the first convoy on the morrow. Fireworks rocketed into the night sky and happy laughter rang through the streets. On the outskirts of the town joyous Bedouin forgot the scarcity of fuel and piled their

campfires high with palm fronds and sticks of wood so that the desert was bright with pin-points of fire.

At midnight a further mishap was reported to de Lesseps. An Egyptian frigate, while clearing the canal of small native craft, had got stuck athwart the canal. For the third time within twenty-four hours de Lesseps ordered gangs of workmen to the scene of the disaster. The men worked all night and it was not until dawn brightened the sky that the frigate was refloated. De Lesseps had spent a sleepless night. With the élite from so many nations taking part in the venture it was essential, not only for him, but for the prestige of France, that the first convoy to enter the canal should pass through without mishap.

Morning brought a fair wind, sunlight sparkled on the vivid blue of the new waterway and the ships were drawn up in line behind Eugénie's *Aigle*, which was to lead them. Cautiously they made their way along the first fifty kilometres of the canal, until Lake Timsah was reached, the midway stop at Ismailia—a township created for the headquarters of the new Suez Canal Company and named after the Khedive. The first half of the canal had been navigated safely. Egyptian men-of-war anchored in the lake fired guns in welcome and bands played from the shore. The banks were dotted with people, many of them guests of the ever-generous Khedive who had invited members of all sects for the momentous occasion. Indeed, so many of his followers presented themselves that there was not a quarter enough tented accommodation to house them.

Early the following day the royal guests disembarked. Gleaming carriages were waiting for them and they were driven through beflagged streets between lines of Lancers on white and grey horses. The procession drew up at de Lesseps's villa where the Empress was handed out of her landau at the entrance and went inside. Crowds pressed against the railings of the front garden hoping she would appear to acknowledge their cheers, but Eugénie had gone through the house and out by the back entrance. She wished to visit an Arab encampment and to do so on camel-back. Being a skilful horsewoman the idea of a camel ride

intrigued her. An interesting painting in the Long Gallery of Abdin Palace shows Eugénie seated on this caparisoned mount, surrounded by various dignitaries. She is dressed becomingly in a pale oyster-coloured silk dress, which shows up her auburn hair to perfection, and holds a matching parasol over her head to guard against the dazzling sunlight.

After her visit to the Arab encampment, the Empress returned to the Khedive's palace at Ismailia—yet another grandiose building made for the festivities. Without pausing for rest, she joined the Emperor of Austria and they drove around the town once more in a pony-chaise, stopping to watch a Bedouin display of horsemanship which the Empress gaily applauded, and later pausing to examine the triumphal arches more closely. Wherever they went cheering people gathered round the carriage to see the ravishing Eugénie. That night Ismail gave a ball for some five thousand guests. The Empress was the guest of honour and, despite her many excursions during the day, there was no trace of weariness on her enchanting face.

At noon the next day the convoy formed in line once more and slowly edged its way towards the Great Bitter Lakes. All went well and by tea-time the goal had been reached. As on the shores of Lake Timsah, the banks were covered with welcoming *fellaheen* and Bedouin accompanied by hordes of animals and innumerable children.

Dinner parties were held on deck aboard various ships that night, after which the guests watched fireworks sparkle against the blue velvet of the sky.

Early next day the convoy started on its final lap to the Red Sea. The morning was auspicious and before luncheon Eugénie wrote in a firm hand in the log-book of the *Aigle*: 'ANCHORED AT SUEZ.' The first convoy had passed safely through the Suez Canal.

The Empress left Egypt with regret. She never forgot the magnificent reception she had received and determined to return one day. Her Egyptian sojourn proved to be one of the happiest periods of her life, for within a few short months her beloved

France was in the throes of war and the following years held much disillusionment.

Time flew by and it was not until 1909 that Eugénie revisited Cairo. She looked much younger than her eighty years and was still very spry. Among her excursions she went to the Pyramids. A member of her party described to me the scene as they went along the same road which had been specially built for her by Ismail—and tears came to her eyes when she recalled the night she had spent there forty years before. Time had not blurred her golden memories of the past.

Two years after the opening of the Suez Canal, Verdi finished his opera *Aïda*. It was to prove the highlight of the Cairo season of 1871, and the opening performance was given on Christmas Eve. Guests at Shephard's Hotel, having heard of the lavish entertainments during the Suez Canal festivities, determined, one and all, to go to the opera which had been inspired by that historical event. Not everyone was lucky for the Royal Opera House seated only seven hundred and fifty people and the tickets had been booked months in advance. The far-seeing manager had obtained blocks of seats, but there were not enough to go round. For those who were fortunate it must have been an enchanting evening.

Mariette's archaeological knowledge recreated the days of the Pharaohs so that magnificent Thebes came to life. The great Hall of Columns at Karnak was reproduced, authentic statuary being lent by the Cairo museum. In Paris, craftsmen had been busy for weeks copying costumes, jewels and ornaments from the originals. When the curtain went up, the audience found ancient Egypt before their very eyes. Instead of extras, there were real Nubian slaves. Through a huge gateway from Pharaoh's temple, a vista of pyramids and palaces could be seen. The acoustics were perfect. The opera was a sensation and news of it spread to the other capitals of the world. The following year, when Verdi conducted it at La Scala, the Italians were so delighted with the music that they presented him with an ivory baton studded with rubies which spelt the name 'Aïda'.

In 1876 the opera was performed in Paris. During that same year Patti sang the much sought-after rôle at Covent Garden, her technique so effortlessly perfect that both audience and critics were enraptured.

Since then Cairo Opera House has resounded with sonorous Arabic and liquid Italian, with French, German and English operas; Pavlova has danced, light as thistledown, across its stage; Duse has played there before wrapt audiences; yet the atmosphere is never so spell-binding as when *Aïda* is about to begin. The elegant auditorium is invaded with an aura of Pharaonic Egypt and not a whisper can be heard. Perhaps the magic is enhanced because the Pyramids of Giza brood in reality over the city outside.

Visitors to the Opera House can still see the original sets for *Aïda*, the jewels and costumes worn by the cast and the red-brocaded gilt chairs on which the Empress Eugénie of France, resplendent in crinoline and diamonds, sat with the Khedive Ismail on the opening night in 1869.

## 4

### General Gordon

THERE was consternation at Shepheard's Hotel once the furore had died down about the opening of the Suez Canal and its remarkable possibilities. The overland route was now in disuse. Might Cairo lapse into a backwater? If travellers to and from the Far East by-passed the city, could the influx of seasonal guests warrant the expense of keeping the luxury hotel open?

The management need not have worried, for the opening of the Suez Canal had brought such publicity to Egypt, and Cairo in particular, that the demand for sightseeing trips was increasing. If the crowned heads of Europe could visit this faraway country safely, the ordinary individual could too, and those who had hesitated to go so far afield in the past now had their apprehensions swept away. Thomas Cook's name had now become well known, not only for arranging journeys, but for comfort and safety as well. With tireless energy, Thomas Cook, together with his son John Mason Cook—who was blessed with the same extraordinary drive as his father—moulded the travel facilities in Egypt to suit their clients, and their arrangements were so good that old Samuel Shepheard himself would have been astonished. For a party of sixty persons going to Palestine from Egypt, the Cooks thought nothing of arranging for 'sixty-five saddle-horses, eighty-seven pack-horses, an unspecified number of mules, twenty-eight asses, fifty-six muleteers, three dragomen, eighteen camp-servants, and five watchdogs' to accompany them.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Cook had already taken a few tourists up the Nile to see the Pharaonic temples and his son became even more enthusiastic about this unique journey. Greeks and Romans had visited the monuments in their day and young Cook wished to bring

<sup>1</sup> *The Thomas Cook Story* by John Pudney (Tauchnitz edition, Stuttgart) 1953.



them within reach, not only of the rich, but of the ordinary Victorian tourist as well. He approached the Khedive, as his father had done before him, to ask if he could hire steamers to start a regular service up and down the river. Ismail, always short of money, was delighted and officially appointed the younger Cook as his government agent for passenger traffic on the Nile. The venture was immensely successful.

People always enjoy something strange, yet at the same time familiar and Cook wrote:

... there is one predominant feeling of interest that underlies all our visits to these lands and waters of Biblical history, i.e. the abiding impression that we are travelling amongst and gazing on scenes with which we have been familiar from our earliest recollections.

By 1875 the Cooks ran a regular steamboat service to Upper Egypt from the first cataract to the second and made plans for tourists to use the mail steamers between Assuit and Aswan. John Mason Cook was soon appointed sole agent for the postal services on all Government ships and by 1880 the Egyptian Government was impressed enough by the enterprising father and son to give them complete control of all passenger steamers; in return for which the Cooks undertook to do the refitting and to run the ships at their own risk and expense.

At Shepherd's the new visitors spent money freely. The Cooks advised in their brochures that:

By far the most important item in an outfit for Egypt is money, and enough of it, for it must not be forgotten that travelling in the East and hotel accommodation are expensive.

The dry atmosphere and winter warmth were mentioned as health-giving and rejuvenating, beneficial for invalids and for those advanced in years who did not fancy an energetic holiday.

A contemporary brochure from Shepherd's reiterates the same claims:

For many ailments the air is the supreme remedy. . . . Let a man come as far East as Cairo and sit but for an hour in the

sun of Shepheard's Terrace and watch the world go by, or stroll for but an hour down the tortuous Mousky ways; let him but hear the call to prayer from a minaret, the blind beggar chant verses from the Koran; let him see a native sail take on a wondrous grace in the wind of a Nile sunset—let him see all this or more, and he will be a new man!

When the writer was gathering material for this book she was fortunate enough to receive the letter from the Hon. Lady Home quoted below. It is a remarkably interesting reminiscence by a gracious lady of ninety-three years of age.

*June 25 1956*

Dear Mrs. Nelson,

I knew Cairo as a girl of fourteen, arriving at Shepheard's Hotel in November, 1878, with my Father and Mother the Hon. George Mostyn and the Hon. Jean Mostyn, to winter in Egypt for my Father's health.

Staying at the Hotel we met Sir Alexander Baird, Lady Baird and their family of three. I used to go donkey riding with the eldest son John—later to become Lord Stonehaven.

The Shepheard's Hotel was very well run by a man called George if I remember rightly. The verandah was a great rendezvous where Sir Alexander Baird sat in his armchair near the entrance to the hotel. His friends used to come in, greet him and sometimes introduce a newcomer of note or interest.

Amongst those who resided at Shepheard's were Sir Auckland Colvin and Sir Charles Rivers Wilson both in high posts and friends of my father.

Sir Alonzo Money a well-known resident of Cairo and his wife and daughter I knew well and went riding with them to Shubra and to the desert. A wedding breakfast was given for Sir Alonzo's daughter at Shepheard's when she was married from the English church.

Inside the hotel there was a small sitting-room which was practically my room, where I was given violin lessons by one of the girl musicians who played in the hall every evening. My

parents' rooms were on the ground floor beyond the hall and dining-room, and led into a small garden where there were two pelicans.

Below the verandah (there were eight steps leading to it from the pavement) were Arab boys selling goods—necklaces etc., and donkeys each with a donkey-boy. Jingling necklaces were on the donkeys' necks and there was a great clatter of strange Arab noises.

Sir Claude Alexander arrived at Christmas and stayed at Shepherd's before proceeding to Luxor.

I was only in Cairo for seven months or so, as we went to Luxor Hotel (just opened) where we stayed three months, returned to Cairo and left in July for England.

I think I can fairly say I am probably the only person living who can recollect as far back as 1878 to Shepherd's Hotel.

Yours sincerely,

Gwendoline Home

It was not only the Hon. Lady Home who particularly noticed the great clatter of donkey-boys outside Shepherd's—Mark Twain did also. He was staying in the hotel about the same time, and he and two of his friends decided to choose suitable mounts to go to Old Cairo. They took some time which amused the on-lookers on the balcony who, he says, were mostly British bound for India. The donkeys were well kept by their owners who Twain referred to as those 'lively young Egyptian rascals'. The 'rascals' spent hours grooming their beasts in the most fanciful manner to attract the eye of the tourist. Donkeys were daubed with black and white zebra lines or had painted stripes of yellow, red and blue; some were allowed to remain their natural colour of white or grey, but even these had patterned coats—achieved by shearing off parts of the hair in curving lines.

When Twain and his friends had made their choice, they mounted their smart steeds and were soon going along at a steady pace. The donkey-boys urged the animals to go faster until they reached a furious gallop. Roaring with laughter, the young men

charged onward and collided with everything in sight until there was a minor stampede. It was not unenjoyable, for, as Twain pointed out, if anyone tired of riding he had only to rest his feet on the ground and the donkey could charge on alone.

Twain did not forget his hair-raising ride and recalled it with nostalgia in *Innocents Abroad*. He remembered the cool exhilarating breeze as they raced, the palm-fringed gardens, the black shadows of the trees at sunset and the silver ribbon of the Nile when they reached it at the end of the day. There they dismounted, boarded a *felucca*—together with donkey-boys and donkeys—and went for a sail on the river.

A Shepherd's donkey-boy was a character in his own right, but he vanished gradually from the scene when motor-cars came into their own. He was still required for desert picnics and various jaunts but his heyday was greatest at the turn of the century. He was usually small and spare of frame, with a roguish expression like a Moorish lad in a Murillo painting. He lived in the streets and had been thrown on his own resources since infancy, so that his familiarity with vice bred a contempt which amounted almost to lack of recognition. Full of audacity his Moslem prejudices sat lightly on his skinny shoulders but he picked up miscellaneous information like a sponge, and although he could neither read nor write, he spoke a smattering of foreign languages fluently. Impervious to both cold and heat, he waited long hours in front of the hotel ready at a second's notice to pounce on a likely customer with the avidity of a cat on a mouse. The amazing energy he displayed, considering his stomach was usually empty, was remarkable. He had great endurance and could trot all day behind his donkey, yelling and dodging among the obstructions in the streets, quite uncomplaining, his only grudge being the tax levied on his donkey by the Government. When he disappeared from the Cairo streets he took part of their colour with him.

Like the donkey-boy, the dervish ceremonies were to vanish from the ken of Shepherd's guests. Not that they ceased to exist but Moslem leaders became dismayed as more and more tourists clamoured to watch certain religious rites.

On the last days of Ramadan when the Khedive's devotions were finished, the Mohammed Ali mosque was thrown open to everyone. Under its domed roof a large circular space was reserved for dancing dervishes and the mosque was brightly illuminated so that light glinted off the honey-coloured alabaster walls and showed up patterns in the magnificent carpeting. Suddenly musicians came forward and began playing tambourines while equally suddenly dervishes slowly began the *Zikh* or 'turning'. Each time a dancer uttered the holy name of Allah, he bent from the waist so that his head nearly swept the ground. The dervishes' long white robes flew out in bell-like shapes and as the whirling grew faster and faster the dancers looked like fantastic tops. The motion increased to a frenzy, the tone of the tambourines swelled in volume, the dancers, in a trance-like state, fell insensible to the floor, were lifted up, came to life once more and would begin whirling again with renewed energy. The drumming and dancing ceased as quickly as it had begun, leaving the on-lookers dazed and in a bewildered state of mind as they left the mosque.

In the eighties visitors took a keen interest in certain sights which would upset the sensitive stomachs of travellers today. The most astonishing dervish rite was called *doseh* and foreigners would watch with bated breath while the Sheik of the Saadiyeh Dervishes rode over prostrate bodies of devotees on horseback. Surprisingly few men were hurt, perhaps because they lay on their faces with legs extended or because a horse will not step on human obstacles if he can help it. When a devotee was trodden on, he uttered the name 'Allah!' in painful veneration.

Every Friday, dancing and howling dervishes could be seen by tourists in 'Old Cairo' until the Khedive finally forbade such exhibitions.

The eighties found Khedive Ismail with almost insuperable worries, not the least being the alarming way the slave traffic from the Sudan was increasing. It was estimated that from the Equatorial Provinces alone some 30,000 slaves were shipped abroad annually. On top of this the Mahdi (He who is directed by God)

had risen to power in Dongola in the Sudan. He had innumerable disciples ready to follow him to the death. His doctrine was that contact with Christians had caused decadence among the faithful, and that he was deputed by God to restore the Faith. Word of this spread throughout the Sudan and as his victories increased and his reputation grew, so did his savagery. Village after village came under his sway and as each one fell his reputation for invincibility was enhanced.

An Anglo-Egyptian General, Hicks Pasha, was appointed leader of a small force sent from Egypt to deter him. Hicks defeated the enemy at Jebel Ain and crossed the desert to El Obeid where he was ambushed by the Mahdi in person. The Egyptians resisted bravely but were so outnumbered that only their rear-guard escaped massacre.

Ismail was prevailed upon to appoint a British Governor-General to the Sudan and he chose the intrepid General Gordon, who had already made a name for himself in China where he had suppressed the Taiping rebels. It was felt that 'Chinese Gordon' would retrieve lost prestige in the Sudan and abolish the slave traffic.

Gordon did his best to get the Sudan on a better footing—a gargantuan task after sixty years of misrule—even cutting down his own salary to a pittance to help the empty Sudanese treasury. Ismail, himself, badly in debt, both respected and trusted Gordon, but he was 'retired' to Naples and his son Tewfik took over in his stead. Tewfik replaced Gordon by another man, Raouf Pasha.

With the Mahdi's continual rise to power the British Government strongly recommended that Gordon should return. Sir Evelyn Baring (later to become Lord Cromer) reluctantly agreed.

Initially Gordon thought of reaching Khartoum by using the Suez Canal and going overland via Suakin and Berber but this idea was changed at the last moment and he was sent to Cairo. A suite was booked for him at Shepheard's and it was in the hotel that plans were discussed to abolish the Mahdist troubles before he left on his ill-fated mission.

John Mason Cook was authorized to make arrangements for

the General and his staff to be taken up the Nile as far as Korosko, where a camel caravan would wait to escort them on to the Sudanese capital. This undertaking by Cook was to need all his tact for he had also promised the authorities to take a certain Emir Abdul Shakour—a former ruler of the Sudan—on the same voyage. To Gordon time was of the essence and he had not bargained for the Emir and his entourage, nor his twenty-three wives and their mountains of luggage. While Gordon champed at the bit in his spacious suite at Shepherd's longing to get under way, the Emir was in no haste to return to the land of his forefathers. Only Cook's discretion kept the beginning of the journey sweet, especially when, at the very last minute, departure was held up because the Emir's dress uniform had been left behind by mistake and he would not leave until it was found.

Gordon's first task was the evacuation of Europeans from the Sudan. He succeeded in getting many away before the Mahdi began his ruthless seige of Khartoum. The weeks went slowly by. In the gruelling heat of mid-April, with few stores and a small, starving force, Gordon held grimly onto the capital. Spartan in his behaviour, he felt nothing was impossible and he determined to hold fast until help came. The following month preparations were made in England for a relief force. Yet from the beginning, everything went against Gordon. Papers sent from Khartoum by trusted officers were captured by the Mahdi's men and Gordon's desperate straits became known.

Alone in his palace during the seige Gordon wrote:

I have the strongest suspicion that tales of troops at Dongola and Mero are all gasworks and that if you wanted to find Her Majesty's Forces you would have to go to Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo.

Actually nothing could have been farther from the truth. At the time of writing the troops referred to were still in England.

At last, after withstanding the seige under dreadful conditions to the limit of human endurance, Khartoum fell.

Even during the last terrible hours Gordon did not give up

hope. His violent death shook the whole civilized world. His body was decapitated, the head being taken to the Mahdi.

The relief forces, believed by Gordon to be roistering at Shepheard's Hotel, arrived two days too late.

If the Mahdi's reputation had spread through the Sudan, so had Gordon's. It was said by the Mahdi's followers: 'Had Gordon been one of us he would have been a perfect man.'



## 5

### Stanley and Slatin Pasha

IN the eighties one of the most celebrated explorers and journalists of the day signed his name in Shepheard's Golden Book—Henry Morton Stanley. He became famous by getting the newspaper scoop of the century for the *New York Herald* when he found Livingstone in the forests of Africa. The story of the hazardous search has blurred with time, yet schoolboys still repeat the famous phrase 'Doctor Livingstone I presume' with which Stanley greeted the Englishman when they met in the steamy jungle.

Now Stanley was to return to Egypt to make arrangements at Shepheard's Hotel for what was to become an equally famous expedition—the relief of Emin Pasha.

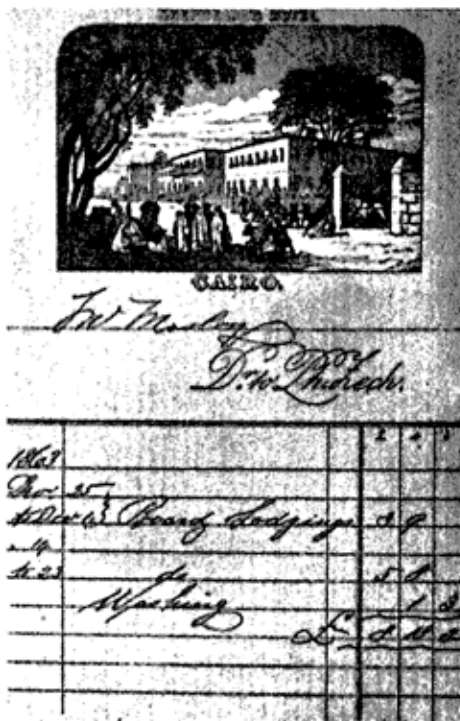
Emin Pasha, a German by birth, had been made Governor of the Equatorial Province in the Sudan during the Gordon campaign. The Mahdi was still victorious and remained a threat to Egypt but his hands were so full in subduing the territories under his sway that he left the borders of Egypt alone and for the same reason had not penetrated into the Equatorial Province. But now he began to cast covetous eyes on it. The Europeans who had opposed him were either dead or slaves. Stanley's expedition was intended to save Emin Pasha from a similar fate. The undertaking stirred the world's imagination and, with the Livingstone story still fresh in everyone's mind, the Geographical Society and newspapers in America and Britain fell over themselves to contribute to the Emin Expedition, hoping for the eventual narrative in return.

Stanley, afire to be in Africa once more, cancelled his various commitments and sailed to Egypt to plan his new undertaking. Adventurous young men from all walks of life besought him to



*The terrace entrance at the turn of the century*

*An hotel bill, 1863*



*The terrace  
steps, 1912*



*Stanley's arrival in 1890*



*Portrait of Samuel Shephard in oriental costume by Frederick Goodall, in the possession of the Rev. Leyland Bird*



*The terrace, before the opening of the Suez Canal*

take them with him. Stanley, knowing full well the perils the future held, was meticulously selective in his choice.

A young doctor called Parke<sup>1</sup> waited impatiently for the explorer to disembark at Alexandria in order to offer his services. Much to Parke's disappointment Stanley was most off-hand and made no promises.

A few days later Parke was overjoyed to receive the following telegram from Cairo.

Surgeon Parke, Medical Officer, Alexandria.

If allowed accompany my expedition what terms required? Are you free to go with me? Send particulars to Shepherd's Hotel.

Stanley.

Parke's reply was short and to the point.

'Certainly. Coming to Cairo tonight.'

That same evening Parke arrived at Shepherd's Hotel. Every bedroom was full so he snatched a few hours' sleep in the reading-room, took a bath, and feeling much refreshed, sought his interview with Stanley. The leader of the expedition found Parke an engaging and intelligent young man with a seriousness beyond his years. Stanley wrote to the General Officer Commanding Egypt, Sir Frederick Stephenson.

SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL

29th January 1887

To: General Officer Commanding Egypt.

Sir,

I should feel exceedingly obliged if you would be good enough to grant permission to Surgeon T. H. Parke of the Medical Staff to accompany the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition as Medical Officer in Charge.

The Medical Officer who had already been appointed has,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Heazle Parke, from whose memoirs, *My Personal Experiences in Equatorial Africa* (Samson, Low & Marston, London, 1891), the correspondence which follows is quoted.

at the last moment, as I learned by cable from London, been compelled to abandon the Expedition. I estimate the duration of the Expedition to be about eight months.

I have the Honour to be Sir,

Your Obedient Servant,

H. M. Stanley.

Parke was granted an indefinite leave of absence and it only remained for an agreement to be drawn up between the two men. The contract was signed by Parke at Shepherd's Hotel on 30th January, 1887.

I, Thomas Heazle Parke, Surgeon Army Medical Staff, agree to accompany the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition and to place myself under the command of Mr. H. M. Stanley, the leader of the Expedition and to accept any post or position in the Expedition to which he may appoint me. I further agree to serve him loyally and devotedly, to obey all his orders, and to follow him by whatever route he may choose, and to use my utmost endeavours to bring the Expedition to a successful issue. Should I leave the Expedition without his orders, I agree to forfeit the passage money, and to become liable to refund all moneys advanced to me for passage to Zanzibar and outfits.

Mr. H. M. Stanley also agrees to give £40 for outfit, and to pay my passage to Zanzibar, and my return to England, provided I continue during the whole period of the Expedition. I undertake not to publish anything connected with the Expedition or to send any account to the newspapers for six months after the issue of the official publication of the Expedition by the leader or his representative.

In addition to the outfit Mr. Stanley will supply the following: tent, Winchester rifle, one revolver, ammunition for the same, canteen, the share of European provisions taken for the party—besides such provisions as the country can supply.

T. H. Parke

Surgeon, Army Medical Staff  
Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo

Shortly afterwards the great adventure began. Stanley left with 650 men, but only 225 of their number were to return to civilization.

Impervious to climatic conditions, Stanley taxed his strength and that of his followers almost beyond endurance. They hacked their way through forests, which stood like phalanxes before them. In the well-nigh impenetrable jungle, hot air rose from the swampy earth, insects sapped the men's vitality and, although moss-festooned branches kept much of the burning sun at bay, they gave no protection against the tropical rain storms. Food gave out and Stanley caught fever, men sickened and died, but somehow Stanley kept the expedition going. After interminable months Emin Pasha was found.

The meeting was in complete contrast to the happy one with Livingstone. Emin loved the life he had carved out for himself and had no desire to return to civilization. He had been spared the fury of the Mahdi before—why not again? Although fully aware of his dangerous situation, he vacillated between wishing to go and wishing to stay. Finally the expedition started its long homeward trek with an unwilling Emin.

Stanley arrived back at Shepheard's Hotel having been away for three long years. His thick hair had whitened and above his white moustache his once round face was now so thin that the bone structure was visible. His eyes, far-seeing and vividly blue, held the habitués of the hotel spellbound whenever they saw him.

A drawing of the year 1890 shows Stanley's arrival at Shepheard's after the expedition. The manager of the hotel goes forward to greet him. The sun streams behind Stanley's wasted body throwing his shadow on the steps, and the onlookers gaze with fascination at the famous figure.

The adulation Stanley received was more than he could bear after his rigorous ordeal. Still suffering from bouts of fever, wearied both physically and mentally, harried by the controversy which raged as to whether Emin should have been forced to return or not, he found the life at Shepheard's Hotel intolerable. After months lying on a rubber sheet spread on the ground of the

unfriendly jungle, he could not sleep in a comfortable bed, while succulent foods choked him after his long diet of bananas and meal. He tried to write the story of the expedition but tore up page after page. He found he could not concentrate. Of this period of transition between life in the jungle and civilization he wrote:

The fashionables of Cairo, in staring at me every time I came out to take the air, made me uncommonly shy; they made me feel as if something was radically wrong with me, and I was too disconcerted to pair with any of them at once. They had been sunning without interruption in the full blaze of social life, and I was too freshly from my three years' meditations in the wilds.

If any of the hundreds I met chanced to think kindly of me at this period, it was certainly not because of any merit of my own, but because of their innate benevolence and ample considerateness. I am inclined to think, however, that I made more enemies than friends, for it could scarcely be otherwise with an irreflective world. To have escaped their censure, I ought to have worn a parchment band on my forehead, bearing the inscription 'Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been in Darkest Africa for three continuous years, living among savages, and I fear something of their spirit clings to me; I pray you have mercy.'

Indeed, no African traveller ought to be judged during the first year of his return. He is too full of his own reflections; he is too utterly natural; he must speak the truth, if he dies for it; his opinions are too much his own.

His stomach, after three years' famishing is contracted, and the successive feasts to which he is invited speedily become his bane. His nerves are not uniformly strung, and his mind harks back to the strange scenes he has just left, and cannot be on the instant focused upon that which interests society. To expect such a man to act like the unconscious man of the world, is as foolish as to expect a fashionable Londoner to win confidence of naked Africans.

To avoid the lounging critics that sat in judgement upon me at Shepherd's Hotel, I sought a retired spot, the Villa Victoria, surrounded by a garden, where, out of sight, I might be out of mind.<sup>1</sup>

In the quietness of the Villa Victoria Stanley wrote his vindication of the rescue of Emin in his book *In Darkest Africa, or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin Pasha*.

Slatin Pasha, another explorer and administrator of 'Darkest Africa' of the same era, found, unlike Stanley, that the luxury of a suite at Shepherd's was conducive to writing about the savagery of primitive people. While immersed in his book *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*, memories of the awful days of his captivity by the Mahdi were made bearable by the comfort and epicurean delights of the hotel.

Slatin Pasha, one of Gordon's best-known governors, had been forced to relinquish his province of Darfur in the early days of the Mahdi campaign. He himself had been captured and remained a prisoner for eleven years. The conditions under which he lived had been so appalling it is remarkable that he survived. Naked, often in chains, with scarcely enough food to keep him alive, he somehow retained his sanity. His most ghastly experience was being shown Gordon's head before it was taken to the Mahdi.

On 26th January, I was sitting chained to the ground in front of my tent when I saw a great crowd coming towards me. In front marched three black soldiers: one named Shatta carried a cloth in which something was wrapped up. He undid the cloth and showed me the head of General Gordon.

Yet after his miraculous escape, Slatin's physique, which must have been of iron, slowly recovered and with it his ambition. In 1896 he was presented to Queen Victoria who wished to hear of his escape from his own lips.

Slatin was appointed Inspector-General in the Sudan by the British fifteen years after its liberation. When at his post in

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography of Henry M. Stanley*, edited by Dorothy Stanley, Samson, Low, London, 1909.



Khartoum, he seldom referred to his captivity and by a quirk of fate was made responsible for the supervision of the New Mahdi's sons at Gordon College.

Each summer and autumn Slatin took his leave in Cairo where he invariably stayed at Shepherd's. His past lent him an aura of romance and he was fawned on by the cosmopolitan set and snowed under with invitations to dinners, balls and levées. Strangers lunching near him in the dining-room would ask who the distinguished-looking man was and were given his full title with pride by the waiters—al-Ferik General Baron Sir Rudolph von Slatin Pasha. How their eyes would have widened could they have seen the immaculate Slatin as he had been when a prisoner of the Mahdi!

The names of other well-known explorers of the day continued to be added to the pages of Shepherd's Golden Book—Wissman and Peters among them. At the turn of the century there was as much adventure in exploring Africa as there was to be in climbing the Himalayas in later years.

## 6

### Shepherd's in the Eighties

By 1888 Shepherd's management had purchased a soldier's club adjoining the hotel and made other alterations to increase the accommodation. Even so, habitual patrons of the caravanserai had difficulty in getting rooms unless they remembered to book well in advance.

One English resident in Alexandria who came to Cairo frequently on business during this period had an unusual experience at Shepherd's. He took the night train from Alexandria, arrived in Cairo about midnight and followed his usual course by taking a carriage to the hotel. He was very tired and was annoyed when he discovered that his secretary had forgotten to book a room. However the night porter, whom he knew, said something would be arranged and in the meantime invited him to take a seat. A drowsy *safragi* appeared in the hall and the night porter had a whispered conversation with him. The servant picked up a lighted candle and the porter smilingly beckoned the late arrival to follow the man upstairs. By dim candlelight he was led to a bedroom on the first floor. The servant opened the door and after ushering him in, hurried away with his candle to fetch a lamp. Feeling unusually fatigued, the exhausted man decided not to wait for the light but to go straight to bed. He felt about in the dark, found a chair, placed his suitcase on it, opened it and pulled out his night-shirt. He hurriedly undressed in the dark, carefully hung his coat and trousers over the back of the chair, closed the suitcase and, having placed his underclothes on top of it, began groping his way to the middle of the room. He suddenly came on the bed, quickly pulled the covers down and climbed in. The bed was not empty. At that moment the servant returned with the lamp and the unfortunate guest, all weariness forgotten, saw to his

horror that not only was the bed occupied, but it was occupied by a corpse.

Telling the story later, he said if he had not given vent to his feelings by giving the *safragi* a good beating he would have died of shock. He discovered that the servant had been told by the night porter not to use room 113 as a guest had just died there. As the servant was half-asleep he had forgotten everything except the number 113.

Oriental servants have not always a very retentive memory as is instanced by an incident which happened many years later to Tim Healey, the famous Irish Judge.

Judge Healey was staying at Shepherd's and had accepted an invitation to dine at the house of a very wealthy Pasha. When the night arrived he telephoned his host to say it was such a glorious evening he did not wish the Pasha to send his car to fetch him, but that he would come on foot. The Pasha, who never walked a step himself, was horrified and protested that it was too warm an evening and too long a walk for the then elderly Tim Healey.

'My mind is made up,' replied Judge Healey cheerfully, 'I would enjoy the walk.'

'But you may get lost, my house is a long way from Shepherd's.'

'Then I shall ask my way,' came the firm reply.

'If you insist on walking,' said the worried voice of the Pasha, 'I shall send one of my *safragis* to walk behind you so that you do not get lost. If you get tired he will get you a taxi.'

The judge demurred a little but finally gave in.

In due course, the *safragi* arrived and Judge Healey started out on his walk. After half an hour he found he could not bear the man following so closely on his heels and suggested the *safragi* should go ahead and lead him. After an hour's walk the judge caught up the *safragi* and asked how much farther they had to go. The man hung his head in shame. He had been so overcome by the honour of leading his master's guest he had completely forgotten the way!

By 1890 the flow of guests had more than doubled at Shepherd's

and the cry 'all rooms full' which was by now a byword of the hotel—and was always to remain so—made it imperative to do something drastic. Finally it was decided to pull down the building with its many annexes and erect in its place a modern hotel with all the latest amenities and increase the number of bedrooms and bathrooms. It was to be in the Italian style of the period with a covering of thick stucco. Once again the hotel emerged in the form of a rectangle enclosing a courtyard with fountains and palms, and what was to become the famous terrace replaced the balcony.

The new building was finished in the record time of five months. Although erected so quickly, much forethought had gone into its planning and decoration. A private generating plant was installed in the south garden and Shepherd's became the first hotel in the Middle East to have electric light. A steam laundry in the basement was another innovation. The office of the Managing Director was built directly over the spot where Kléber had been stabbed to death, and the sycamore-tree could be seen from his window. The main ground-floor passage looked like a picture gallery for it was hung with delightful paintings of Egypt by such eminent artists as Lamplough, Linton and Talbot together with etchings, lithographs and drawings of state occasions at Shepherd's. When the building was completed it ranked as one of the most elaborate hotels of the day.

The ageing Philip Zech found an heir who was to have the Midas touch—Charles Baehler. In time he was to be referred to as the 'Hotel King'.

Baehler was born in Switzerland and was the first of a distinguished group of Swiss hoteliers who brought more fame and fortune to Shepherd's. He had humble beginnings, starting as a greengrocer's assistant. Later he was apprenticed to the Commercial Bank at Basle. Through his banking connections he was eventually to attract Swiss capital to Egypt. Samuel Shepherd and his wife had met him when he was little more than a youth and Mrs. Shepherd, instinctively realizing his potentialities, engaged him as an accountant for her husband's hotel. Baehler never

looked back and quickly made his way to the top. His hotel career was both fantastic and romantic and was to last for fifty years. He won the French National Lottery of 40,000 golden francs TWICE. He founded the Egyptian Hotel Ltd., the Upper Egyptian Hotels Ltd., and in time—with Swiss and Egyptian capital—acquired the Gezireh Palace Hotel; so that his companies embraced most of the hotels in Egypt. He started the Electric Light Company in Cairo, erected the Bachler Apartment House in Kasr El Nil and a huge block of flats in Gezireh.

Bachler also became well known in the sporting world and his stables produced some of the finest horses in Egypt. He travelled back and forth to Switzerland and bought the Castel Neu-Habsburg in Meggen-Lucerne where he bred many international Saint Bernard champions. He was a gregarious, handsome man with a mane of silver hair. Six foot tall, he was noticeable in any crowd. He was never happier than in a cosmopolitan gathering.

He enlarged Shepherd's, the best loved of his hotels, twice during his lifetime, but he regarded the building of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem as the apex of his career. It is still one of the world's most beautiful hotels.

His banking background enabled him to evolve his own book-keeping methods, and that, combined with his organizing ability, enabled him to keep his fingers on the pulse of his many concerns. At his death his hotels could accommodate some 4,000 guests.

In the eighties, however, Bachler was head waiter at Shepherd's and his fantastic success was still in the future. In those days there were several long tables in the dining-room and when parents dined out with friends they would instruct the young Mr. Bachler to keep an eye on their daughters and to take care where he seated them.

Each winter a Mr. and Mrs. Locke came to Cairo for their health. One season they stayed at a small inn near the Pyramids and, finding the dry crisp air of the desert exhilarating and beneficent, they bought the place and rebuilt it as the present Mena House. Mena was the name of the first King of Egypt who combined Upper and Lower Egypt under his sway and the Lockes

felt that since they had managed to combine so many good things for their guests, including an uninterrupted view of the Pyramids, the name 'Mena' was not inappropriate. Mena House was designed to look like an old English manor outside, but it was furnished in oriental style within. The dining-room had a mosque-like atmosphere enhanced by a galaxy of dim lights suspended from a high, domed ceiling. *Mashrabiya* work reached the peak of its perfection during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and Shepherd's was fortunate enough to acquire many antique screens of this period. Collectors were not so eager in the eighties as they afterwards became and the Lockes also managed to discover a number of these delightful screens. They can still be seen at Mena House.

Another hotelier of the calibre of Bachler was now coming to the fore—George Nungovich. His life also had had humble beginnings. He was a Greek Cypriot and had started as a railway porter in Cairo station in 1883. He joined the British troops in their first Sudanese campaign as a canteen and mess caterer and in a short time returned to Cairo rich enough to buy a building which he called the Angleterre Hotel. When the troops returned to Cairo he was at the station to meet them and said he could accommodate all the officers in his new establishment. Owing to his experience at the front he knew how British officers liked things done and he saw to it that they wanted for nothing. When the time came for paying the bill, Nungovich absolutely refused to take any money, saying the presence of such guests was reward enough. Needless to say, after such a generous gesture, many army officers patronized his hotel.

Later Nungovich opened the Continental and took Luigi Steinschneider, who had been head waiter at Shepherd's, into partnership. Nungovich found, as Samuel Shepherd and Zech had, that there was not enough space to accommodate his guests and he converted some palatial buildings, which had belonged to the Princess Toussoun, into the Savoy. He offered the management of this latest hotel to a young Swiss, Auguste Wild, who had been manager at the Baur au Lac in Zürich.

Under Auguste Wild's management the Savoy became one of the most exclusive hotels in the Middle East.

The Khedive created Wild a Bey—and it was as Wild Bey that countless Britons knew him when he moved to England before the Second World War. Today he presides over the welfare of two English hotels, the Royal Court Hotel, Sloane Square, in London and the Highcliffe Hotel in Bournemouth. Wild Bey, now nearly ninety, leaves the direct supervision of his hotels to his son Robert at the Royal Court and to his brother Joseph in Bournemouth.

Wild Bey, in his entertaining memoirs *Mixed Grill in Cairo*, says<sup>1</sup> of the costs of the hotel business in Cairo in the eighties:

We made a profit of fifteen thousand pounds on a season lasting a little more than four months. The charge 'en pension' was a hundred piastres (£1 or \$3) a day per person; our clients spent a lot of money on wines and champagnes, and the bar was also a profitable concern. We bought whisky from the Distillers Company at four shillings a gallon and bottled it in our own cellars, so that, including eight per cent excise duty and the cost of the corks, the bottle of whisky cost us only one and six.

Notwithstanding the competition of the new hotel, Shepherd's fame continued to grow.

Wild says of Shepherd's:

A good deal of our business in the early days came from Shepherd's. I used to call it our reservoir. It would not only have been difficult but almost impossible to have got results from advertising the Savoy in Europe or the U.S.A. as Shepherd's had such a unique world-wide reputation. I remember in the first years the big steamers arrived with 50 or 70 passengers booked for the Savoy, out of 250, the rest going to Shepherd's. Soon after the steamer left New York we received cancellations almost daily, so only a quarter of those originally

<sup>1</sup> Privately printed by Sydeham & Co., Ltd., Bournemouth, 1952.

booked for the Savoy arrived. The reason was that when they asked the other travellers where they were staying in Cairo they heard Shepherd's . . . Shepherd's . . . Shepherd's . . .'

As soon as a ship moved into Alexandria a fleet of small, brightly painted boats came alongside and from them dragomen shouted the names of the hotels they represented. The passengers, affected by such enthusiasm could scarcely wait to get ashore. 'Shepherd's! Shepherd's!' could be easily distinguished among the cries. 'Shepherd's! Shepherd's!' the passengers cried back good-naturedly. One Alexandrian hotelier wrote bitterly: 'The tourists of the world who come here seem to be racing against time to reach Shepherd's terrace.'

Once ashore pandemonium reigned. The customs were courteous but the dragomen pounced on the visitors and, with deafening clamour, rushed them into horse-drawn gharries and made for the station. Miraculously, luggage and owners arrived at the right hotel despite the frenzied jostling.

Wealthy visitors travelled with a private courier and so avoided the uproar. Such a man made all arrangements, from booking hotel accommodation (he received from the hotel his keep and ten per cent of what his employer spent there) to organizing dragomen and expeditions.

The hotel staffs were not unaffected by the heady atmosphere of the winter season. When they were off duty they had donkey races of their own in the moonlight near the Pyramids, hotel raced against hotel, in a wild effort to bring honour to their respective establishments. No one seemed to tire and the men returned to work in high spirits. During the summer months when the hotels closed, it was a matter of honour that one remained open during the seasonal lull. There was good riding to be had by the skeleton staff, who exercised the hotel's carriage horses. Donkeys were still considered *de rigueur* and the Sirdar, Lord Kitchener, rode a magnificent white donkey to his office every morning. This great soldier and statesman was a retiring man and hated social life, but as Sirdar he was forced to take part in the social whirl and for



twelve years Shepherd's became his favourite *rendez-vous*, and Charles Baehler a personal friend.

Before Kitchener became Sirdar he had led a quiet army life and had been interested only in military matters. Many visitors to Shepherd's had been unaware of the unstable frontier between Egypt and the Sudan, and that British prestige was still smarting under the fall of Khartoum. As a young lieutenant Kitchener had helped to raise a force of *fellaheen* for the defence of Egypt, and it now fell to his lot to avenge the murder of Gordon.

Gradually, painstakingly, Kitchener had gathered an expeditionary force and seen to it that a railway was built to shorten the two-thousand-mile trek to the heart of the Sudan. No publicity had been given to the undertaking and with no flags flying, as silently as the proverbial Arab, Kitchener and his army vanished into the unknown.

Four long years of campaigning followed. On 2nd September 1898, Kitchener's army marched into the city of Omdurman, and once again British and Egyptian flags flew over the capital. Gordon's murder had been avenged and Kitchener returned to Cairo an acclaimed hero.

A golden era now fell upon Egypt. There was great prosperity, if not for the *fellah* in the field, certainly for his relatives in the cities. The cosmopolitan set dispensed hospitality even more lavishly than in the past. There was sailing, polo, racing, dancing, picnics and a hundred ways to while away the time during the sunny days and moonlit nights. Hostesses vied with each other over dinner lists. The banquets at Shepherd's were the talk of the day and the *Marfooten* gave a magnificent dinner at the hotel for Lord Kitchener of which happily a menu card, designed and signed by one of the guests at the banquet, still exists. Diplomats entertained as if money were no object. Financial transactions seemed to benefit all concerned and brokers came in to lunch at Shepherd's with satisfied smiles on their faces.

Tourism was becoming such an important feature of the country that the idea of a Travel Association grew up among the hotel proprietors. Lord Kitchener was approached and when he learnt

that Shepherd's, the Wagon Lits Company, Messrs. Thomas Cook, and The Savoy Group were prepared to guarantee contributions to nurse the project through its teething troubles, he authorized the Egyptian Railways to produce money equal to the largest subscription. The association started with a sum of £2,000 and is still thriving.

Kitchener became a beloved figure to the Egyptians; he especially liked the *fellaheen* and could speak Arabic colloquially as well as fluently. He was presented with an island near Aswan in Upper Egypt where he could indulge his passion for flowers. He ordered plants from India and all over the Middle East and the island became an enchanting garden which is still referred to as 'Kitchener's Island', and is one of the beauty spots visited by tourists today.

Kitchener was an avid reader and Duemar, a little bookshop next to Shepherd's, became very popular when it was known that Sirdar bought all his books there. He was a great antiquarian and collected pieces for his large house in England. He enjoyed bargaining in the Mousky, which he visited twice a week, becoming such a well-known and revered figure there that at his death it closed for the day—a tribute seldom paid to anyone.

## 7

## The Turn of the Century

BUILDINGS have personalities of their own; they charm, fascinate, repel—or are pitiless like the Pyramids. The caravanserai that was Shepherd's had always attracted the romanticism in men and this aura of romance found its focal point in 1898 when the great central courtyard was transformed into the Moorish Hall. The open space was roofed over and surmounted by a magnificent glass dome. The high vaulting was mosaicked in Arabic style and from it hung splendidly wrought bronze chandeliers. The Moorish Hall was large and secret: pearl-inlaid tabourets, honey-coloured alabaster tables, comfortable divans and chairs were scattered over Persian rugs whose predominant colour was cardinal red. Striped and painted arches partly concealed recesses where friends met, or lovers whispered together. When the hall was full of animated chatter and lights blazed down on silken evening frocks, the atmosphere was heady and gay, but in a subdued light the *mashrabiya* screens came into their own and lent an air of mystery so that people were unaccountably silent. It was not people who lent atmosphere to Shepherd's—but Shepherd's to them.

The ballroom was decorated in Louis XVI style and boasted a superb Ismail chandelier made of thousands of glittering crystals. It leant itself to a sudden vogue for fancy-dress balls which caught on like wildfire. People took endless trouble to make their costumes authentic and some of them were so real they were mistaken for genuine—and a few of them were. On one occasion His Beatitude, Porphyrios II, Archbishop of the Autocephalous Church of Mount Sinai, came disguised as himself! A misunderstanding was caused by a well-known Caireen who arrived dressed as a water-carrier and was promptly thrown down the steps by



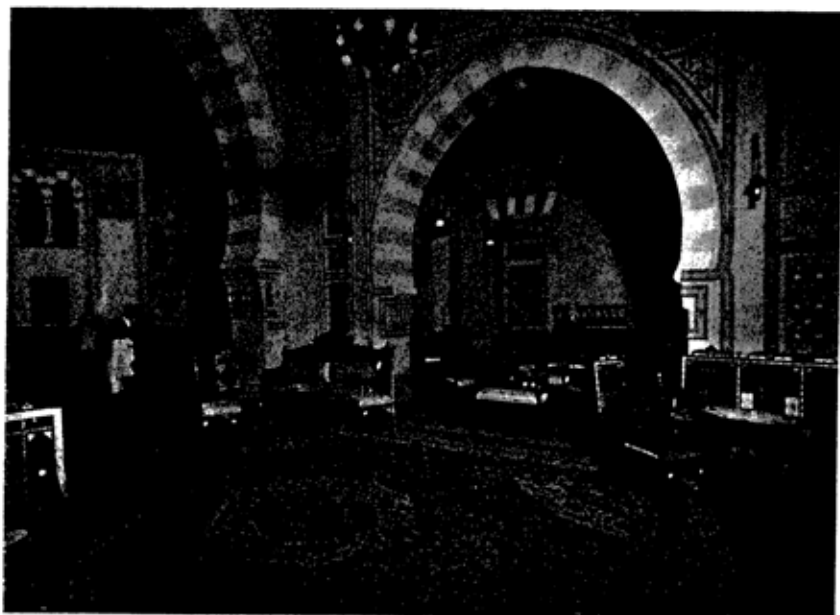
*A parade in front of Shepherd's Hotel, 1889—A water carrier is laying the dust so that those on the terrace suffer no discomfort*



*The Sirdar's syces, Cairo 1889  
(Both reproduced from 'The Graphic' of 1889)*



*Shepherd's Hotel after the first World War. (Photograph American Express Company Inc.)*



*The Moorish hall*

one of the servants for daring to enter the hotel. These were the days of the Russo-Japanese war, and a new Russian minister checked in at the desk one evening knowing nothing of the fancy-dress ball to be held that night. He decided to take a stroll before unpacking and as he went out of the foyer a Scandinavian judge walked in dressed as a Samurai, complete with murderous-looking sword. The Russian looked aghast—and promptly fainted.

The style of ladies' dresses was so bulky at this period that large cupboards were built in the corridors to house them. One New Year's Eve some young army officers, who had dined too well, thought they would like to go to the fancy-dress ball being held that evening, and having no costumes decided to raid the cupboards on the first floor. They soon decked themselves out in ostrich feathers and flounced petticoats and skirts; in their borrowed finery, they made a noisy entrance in the middle of the dancing and gave an impromptu cabaret. Everyone found it hilariously funny that night but it was a different story the following morning when the management had a difficult time pacifying the ladies whose clothes had been ruined.

Army officers were invariably a part of Shepherd's clientèle and the bachelor bedrooms on the ground floor were much favoured by young officers because they quickly discovered they could get in through their bedroom windows from the garden if—after too good a party—they did not feel up to passing people on the terrace. This did not save one inebriated captain from embarrassment one night when he returned late from a dinner. He could not see very well and entered what he thought was his own room to find a lady undressing. She screamed for help and the intruder hurriedly scrambled out of the window. The following morning he sent a note of apology to the lady. It appeared she had checked into the hotel the preceding day only to find her reservation had not been received. However, one of the bachelor rooms was vacant and she had taken it for a week.

Banquets and dinner parties were repasts that lasted several hours. Iced punch was served between courses to stimulate the appetite. As many as seven wines would accompany any banquet

at Shepherd's. There was a continual round of dinner parties between private houses, legations and hotels. Those who suffered from digestive disorders did not enjoy this type of entertainment save at Shepherd's where all they had to do was catch the understanding eye of a waiter who would whisk an offending dish out of sight before anyone else realized what was happening. This practice was impossible in a private house. Sir Eldon Gorst, Financial Adviser to the Egyptian Government, who had an invalid's stomach and a small appetite, thought he had found the answer when he was invited to a dinner at the home of an Egyptian Pasha. It is particularly difficult to persuade an Egyptian that if a guest refuses food he does not mean he is not enjoying himself. Sir Eldon accepted the invitation but, to avoid hurting his host by eating too little, requested that there should only be one course. Without betraying Egyptian hospitality and at the same time bowing to the wish of his distinguished guest, a single course was produced of an enormous whole roasted lamb. When it was carved it was seen to be full of large chickens, the chickens in turn contained quail and these were stuffed with smaller birds!

After one of these large dinners nothing gave greater contentment than sipping coffee on Shepherd's terrace and watching life go by. When the stars came out, they lay so close to the tree-tops that the street and gardens were as light as day. Satisfied guests would be lost in reverie as the moon rose and lent pearly enchantment to the Ezbekieh. Sometimes Egyptian weddings took place by torchlight and would process in front of the hotel, the bridegroom escorted by his friends, his bride in a closed brougham guarded by running *saises*, or in a palanquin on a lumbering camel. The night air was heavy with the heady perfume of jasmine as the flower-sellers held up their trays for inspection along the pavement. Not everyone could refuse the liaceous blossoms twined together in bracelets and leis, or the nosegays with roses tucked in the centre and tied with silken ribbons. Only when the night air became chilly did residents bestir themselves to go indoors.

Many people who came to Egypt for a holiday remained there

for the rest of their lives. A jovial and much-travelled American, Mr. David Garrick Longworth, arrived in Cairo one fine day and settled down. He started *The Sphinx*, an illustrated social magazine which became to Cairo what *The Tatler* is to London. *The Sphinx* reported forthcoming events and noted the celebrities staying in the capital. It was amusing for Mr. and Mrs. Smith to find their names next to a countess or an earl as 'staying at Shephard's'. The magazine recorded in one edition: 'Fancy! Mr. and Mrs. Shephard are staying at The Savoy.' Mr. Longworth also founded the Sphinx Bar where, if accounts are to be believed, most of the articles for the magazine were written. The tavern did not have the long life of its literary brother, but in its day it was a fashionable, amusing place with a Bohemian atmosphere.

It was not far from Shephard's and many of the guests would wander round there in the evening for an after-dinner drink.

*The Sphinx* magazine never wanted for society gossip and Shephard's was one of the chief sources of supply, but even the terrace habitués were agog when it was rumoured that Princess Caraman-Chimay would be arriving at the hotel with her gipsy lover, Rigo. Mrs. Alexander, the Princess's mother, lived at Shephard's during the winter season and, while talking to the United States diplomatic Agent and Consul General, Mr. Thomas Skelton Harrison, at the Sphinx Bar one evening, she mentioned that Clara, her beautiful daughter, was coming to Cairo—this confirmed the story. Clara had married Prince Caraman, the son of the Belgian Minister in Paris, when she was but eighteen. The eligible Prince had been fêted and sought after by the most fashionable hostesses in Paris. One of the most lovely demi-mondaines of the day, Madame Musard, on whom William III had bestowed a fortune, had given a memorable dinner in his honour at which she had greeted him wearing a dress covered with three thousand pearls. The Prince successfully eluded the fair sex until he met Clara, when he was immediately smitten by her dazzling beauty and vivaciousness. It was a most suitable match; the Prince was handsome and Clara an American heiress in her own right. After their marriage the Princess made her début in



Parisian society. She quickly became the leader of a young and reckless set, and her extravagance caused the sages to shake their heads. It was soon apparent that Clara lived only to dance and have a good time. Maxim's was at the height of its popularity and most women who dined there were infatuated with the handsome orchestra leader—a gipsy named Rigo—who played the violin with emotional verve; the Princess was no exception—save that she ran away with him, and it was with Rigo that she came to Cairo. They took a suite at Shepherd's and became the talk of the town.

Each day there was silence on the terrace when the Princess and her lover appeared at the front door to go driving. The elegant pair were a delight to look at, the sophisticated Princess in her Paris frocks and jewels, and the slim Rigo, supremely assured and lithe as a tiger. He would hold her shapely arm as they walked across the terrace and down the steps to their waiting carriage. Rigo would hand the Princess in, jump up gracefully beside her, taking the reins of their two thoroughbred Hungarian horses. The Princess would give a little nod and, with a crack of the whip from one of Rigo's gloved hands, the prancing horses swept out of sight at a gallop.

The lovers' favourite haunt became the Sphinx Bar, where the clientèle greatly increased when it became known that Rigo always brought his violin. He would tuck it beneath his chin and play lively Tzigane music with such zest that people could not keep their feet still. The bar profited even more from Clara and Rigo's patronage when a larger than life-size portrait appeared on one of the walls. It was of the Princess reclining on a divan—in the nude.

The capricious couple became so notorious that Shepherd's manager was forced to ask them to vacate their suite. They moved to another hotel but continued to be the centre of attention at the Sphinx Bar. They remained in Cairo for two seasons, where they were alternately petted and ostracized. Finally they left for Europe, where the Princess tired of her gipsy lover and married an Italian.

In spite of increased accommodation there was never enough room to house all those who wished to stay at Shephard's. This state of affairs constantly harassed the management. As in the past, the very bathrooms were brought into use as bedrooms and, as usual, the guests were delighted. It was said each manager in turn had the happy knack of making guests feel so important that even those who were bowed into quickly converted bathrooms, felt as if they had been given a royal suite. This practice was jocularly referred to in letters received from would-be guests:

I can accept a bathroom as a bedroom,  
but not a bedroom without a bathroom.

Another in like vein ended:

I would like a room with a bath but  
not a bath without a room.

Actually no one cared about cramped space as long as he could sleep beneath Shephard's famous roof. So many people were turned away that finally, when not otherwise engaged, the paddle-steamers owned by Thomas Cook and the Anglo-American Company were moored to the river banks and pressed into service as floating hotels.

The winter seasons flew by all too quickly for the visitors and by spring, when the last of them had departed, Shephard's would close with the coming of the hot weather.

The summer of 1902 brought an epidemic of Asiatic cholera, which was surprising since a quarantine station had been built at Suez, where the Muslims, returning from their pilgrimages, underwent a rigorous course of purification. The cause of the outbreak was traced to a pilgrim who had hidden a small bottle of water from the Holy Places in his robe and, so that all his friends and relations might share the precious fluid, had poured it into his village well. The epidemic spread into every corner of Egypt. In Cairo alone there were a thousand deaths a day. As always, however, the deaths suddenly declined and by autumn the epidemic had spent itself. Hotels reopened, staffs returned and the

managers anxiously scanned their lists of incoming guests. At Shepherds, where cancellations would have been welcome, there were none, and the porters were soon fetching and carrying luggage past the hall desk where extraneous guests were politely but firmly told they must find accommodation elsewhere.

To Egyptians, the opening of the Aswan Dam was as great an event as the opening of the Suez Canal had been to the shipping world. It was the first time in history that the Nile waters had been harnessed. The flow of the mighty river could be regulated, crops were assured and five hundred thousand more acres were brought under cultivation. Surplus inundation could be checked and the constant fear of loss of homes and lives became a thing of the past.

The Khedive performed the opening ceremony at Aswan, attended by his ministers, the Diplomatic Corps and scores of visitors. Special trains were chartered for those who had not the time to go by the more leisurely route along the river. Sir John Aird, the chief designer, was overwhelmed with congratulations, and celebrations were held throughout the country. The Agricultural Bank and the National Bank of Egypt were thriving. More irrigation projects came into effect and there was great confidence in the future. During the next few years business of every kind boomed. One of the biggest deals of the time was the selling by the Egyptian Government of five thousand acres of desert land north of Cairo; Belgian money secured most of it and a railway line was built to link the site to Cairo—so began the modern suburb of Heliopolis. Buildings rose one after another, the most ambitious—intended at first to be a large casino like that at Monte Carlo—eventually became the Heliopolis Palace Hotel.

The International Sleeping Car Company now owned several hotels in Europe and Egypt, Shepherd's was one, having come under its control on the death of Zech. The company decided it was a good time to sell. Nungovich, now extremely wealthy, and more interested in finance than hotels, was offered a fifty per cent interest in Shepherd's. He asked his wife how she would enjoy being the 'Grande Dame' of Shepherd's terrace, but she was

not interested. He held out for fifty-five per cent, lost interest, and did not close the deal.

Charles Baehler, by now general manager at Shephard's, settled the issue by offering to buy the shares of the Egyptian Hotel Company at ten shillings each. It was an excellent gamble and in a short space of time each share was worth ten pounds!

As the boom continued, Shephard's prospered, for added to the usual visitors were foreign speculators and financiers. The visitors themselves had flutters in real estate and joined companies to get on the band-wagon. There seemed to be no shortage of money.

Such was the demand to stay at Shephard's at this time that subterfuges had to be employed to make people stay elsewhere. Coachmen were actually bribed to decant would-be guests at other hotels. When the ruse was discovered people would demand furiously to be taken to Shephard's—only to find their drivers had disappeared. Sometimes a guest could be appeased and remained where he was. Others were not so easily fobbed off and, picking up their luggage themselves, would WALK to Shephard's and demand accommodation.

The terrace was now as internationally famous as the hotel itself and it was said that if you sat there long enough you would see every celebrated person in the world at one time or another. One habitué was Harry Boyle, the Oriental Secretary. He was brilliant, a great linguist and a lover of eighteenth-century literature. Like so many men of genius, who spend much time delving in archives, dress meant little to him. He took a constitutional most days, ending with tea on Shephard's terrace.

One afternoon, in his usual attire of battered straw hat, baggy trousers and old jacket, he was approached on the terrace while drinking his tea by a perfect stranger, who bent close to him and whispered:

'Sir, are you the hotel pimp?'

Boyle, without batting an eyelid, replied:

'I am, sir, but the management, as you may observe, are good enough to allow me the hour of five to six as a tea interval. If,

however, you are pressed, perhaps you will address yourself to that gentleman.' And he pointed to the six-foot-tall burly figure of Sir Thomas Lipton, who was sipping tea near by. 'He is taking my duty; you will find him most willing to accommodate you in any little commissions of a confidential character which you may see fit to entrust to him.'<sup>1</sup>

Harry Boyle then hurriedly paid his bill and made a quick getaway—but not before he heard a resounding thud behind him of a body being hurled to the marble floor.

Another brilliant but strange man, Dr. Douglas Dunlop, the British Educational Adviser to the Egyptian Government, was a constant visitor at Shepherd's, yet he was a complete recluse and scarcely ever seen by officials or even his own staff. He lived alone, refused to mix with anyone or join clubs, but he enjoyed dining by himself at Shepherd's. He was an epicure and always booked the same table, where he gave himself up to the contemplation and enjoyment of good food and wine, completely alone and utterly oblivious to those about him.

A distinguished couple who stayed at Shepherd's during the year 1910 were President Theodore Roosevelt and his charming wife, and the most outstanding event that season was the garden party they gave in Shepherd's gardens.

Wild Bey, of the Savoy, was asked to lend his large Westinghouse automobile to Mrs. Roosevelt and immediately placed it at her disposal. Mrs. Roosevelt was to visit Abdine Palace and wished to arrive in a closed car. The Westinghouse was the only one of its kind in Cairo and had originally belonged to a friend of Wild Bey's in Switzerland. It was a colourful vehicle to say the least; inside, it had red curtains which could be drawn over the windows and there was a removable hood: outside, it was bright yellow with a red stripe, the same colours as the landaus of the Swiss Alpine Post.

'When the German Kaiser said, "Watch out for the Yellow Peril", he meant Japan!' remarked Wild Bey. 'But in Cairo when

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Sir Ronald Storrs in *Orientations* (Nicholson and Watson, London, 1937).

someone said, "Watch out for the Yellow Peril", it meant something far more terrible—my Westinghouse!

When Mr. Roosevelt thanked Wild Bey for lending the car he exclaimed, 'It was bully! just bully!'

The following year found three American millionaires staying at Shepheard's at the same time: Mr. Pierpont Morgan, the banker, Mr. Allison Armour, of the Chicago Beef Trust, and Mr. Walter Jennings, of the Standard Oil Company.

One of Lawrence's great friends now made his appearance in Egypt, a young civil servant named Ronald Storrs. He had not been in Cairo more than a day or so when his chief asked him to show a high dignitary of the Anglican Church round the city. He had no time to prepare a tour before his guest arrived, but thought it would be a good idea to take him to lunch at Shepheard's while he decided what to do. At the end of the meal he begged to be excused for a short time and, leaving his guest to amuse himself on the terrace by watching those about him, dashed down the steps. He hurried to his flat, read up his Baedeker, decided where to go sightseeing, and returned to the terrace within half an hour. His guest had scarcely missed him. The two men spent a pleasant afternoon in Old Cairo, visiting the place where Moses was supposed to have been found in the bulrushes, and the oldest Coptic Church, Mari Gurgis, where the Holy Family, tradition relates, rested on their way through Egypt.

Sir Ronald was to become a well-known figure to both the Egyptians and the British in Egypt. His tact and bonhomie were equalled only by his wit. Once someone was discussing the annoying habit people had of arriving late at the Royal Opera House and referred to them as:

'Those villains who stumble to their stalls over a bridge of thigs.' To which Sir Ronald's quick rejoinder was 'Yes, hips that pass in the night!'

Many of the international musicians who stayed at Shepheard's during their travels helped Ronald Storrs run his musical Wednesday Afternoons. He was not a virtuoso himself but loved music and possessed a Blüthner grand in his small drawing-room. The

atmosphere during his concerts was delightful; the only lighting, besides a standard-lamp for the piano, was from a tall Fourth Dynasty cone of honey-coloured alabaster. Concerts were few and far between in Cairo before the First World War and, since Sir Ronald could only invite twelve guests at a time, there was a great demand for invitations.

The only musical event during the year was the Opera Season. There was usually an excellent Italian company at the Royal Opera House. The days had gone by when Khedives had been handed flowers and gold pieces by Sudanese attendants 'to pelt their favourites', but the evening frocks and glittering jewels of the ladies and the splendid uniforms of the men were as resplendent as ever.

*Aida* was produced in a new setting in 1912—at the foot of the Great Pyramid of Cheops. Many people travelled to Egypt just to see it. People could talk of nothing else. The newspapers gave the idea great publicity and predicted a huge success. Auditions were held for muscians from Cairo and Alexandria to swell the Italian Opera Company orchestra and they practised long hours into the night. Scores of Bedouin riders with their camels and horses were hired as extras. Shepherd's corridors echoed with chatter and speculation as to whether it would be better to get tickets for the day or night performance. Many acquired tickets for both.

The great day arrived, sunny and bright, and hundreds of tourists came from far and near in landaus, automobiles or by special lines of trams linked together especially for the event. Great blocks of seats were divided in alphabetical order, each letter being prominently affixed to a high, narrow post. For once, on such a crowded occasion, there was room for everyone. The figures of policemen were dotted here and there on the side of the great pyramid to keep interlopers away; they looked like black specks. To the mounted extras far away in the sand dunes it seemed that the great flat space before the pyramid was a vast field of waving flowers, due to the men's straw boaters and the ladies' wide-brimmed hats in a variety of bright colours.

The audience gazed silently at the vast set with its fantastic five-

thousand-year-old backdrop stretching up into the blue sky. A gigantic statue of Isis stood to one side of a tented dais, where stood Pharaoh's golden throne.

The conductor raised his baton and the music swelled out over the desert. Aïda's tragic story came to life. The triumphal march music had never been more stirring than when the procession of trumpeters, priests, golden chariots and dancing-girls was followed by the Bedouin horsemen galloping over the sand.

That same night the performance was given again under the light of a full moon. When the Bedouins galloped on, they flourished flaming torches above their heads. The moonlight turned everything to gold. Never was *Aïda* to have such a breathtaking setting again.

Little did people suspect that the war clouds were gathering.



## 8

## The 1914 War

GERMAN commerce was steadily increasing during the season 1913-14 and there was a marked pro-German feeling in Egypt. The number of German tourists increased. Even Shephard's—never averse from turning visitors away—made a special effort to house a German choir, consisting of over 300 members, and had to rent near-by houses to do so. Charles Bachler's manager at the hotel was a Herr Hein. The German Orient Bank had opened branches in Alexandria and Cairo and German influence even extended to the Royal Opera House, where Wagnerian singers were the order of the day. Then came the tragic news of the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo and war seemed to come overnight. The Germans melted away from Egypt and those who remained were either interned in Malta or kept under strict scrutiny.

Egypt remained docile in the midst of the holocaust. The Khedive was deposed and was succeeded by Prince Hussein Kamel, son of the famous Ismail. Like Ismail before him, Hussein was pro-European, generous to a degree, and a true cosmopolitan. He was of medium height, handsome and had great personal charm. Although utterly devoted to his own people, he had been brought up in France and his leanings were French.

As the war progressed, Egyptian trade soared and cotton fetched hitherto unknown prices. Not for the first time, Cairo streets teemed with khaki figures. The Allied Forces bought food for themselves and fodder for their animals, and the pay of both officers and men poured into the coffers of Cairo, Alexandria and the Canal Zone.

Times of strife and excitement do not change people fundamentally. The Egyptians are great lovers of proverbs and will

ponder their significance for hours at a time. There is one about the Nile flowing into Palestine—a synonym for the impossible, since the latter is higher above sea-level than Egypt. By a quirk of fate this was turned to good account. Recruiting for the Labour Corps had been going badly and it was difficult to know what would entice the *fellaheen* to offer their services. Sir John Maxwell, the General Officer Commanding in 1915, laid a pipeline into Sinai to supply water for the forces during the desert campaign. Sir John was making the impossible come true. And by Allah he did! The Arabs were astonished and delighted and there was a marked rise in recruitment to the Labour Corps!

Egyptians also set great store by names and their meaning. As a war measure, Britain decreed that Egypt was to become a 'Protectorate'. This made virtually no difference save that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came directly under the High Commissioner. But the word 'Protectorate' in Arabic is 'Himaya', which is unfortunately associated with degradation, and caused much hard feeling.

On the other hand General Allenby's name in Arabic became 'Allah-Nabi'—the Prophet of God—and when his signature appeared on public proclamations asking for volunteers for such forces as the Egyptian Camel Corps, the *fellaheen* rushed to enlist.

Allied officers had taken the place of tourists at Shepheard's. One of these officers found himself temporarily in charge of a string of camels awaiting transfer to the Camel Corps. They had been presented by a wealthy Pasha; and the officer wondered how they should be cared for. He left the hotel a puzzled man. Before dismissing his morning parade, he asked if anyone knew anything about the camels. A small cockney stepped forward.

'Yes, sir, I do.'

'Can you exercise and feed them?' the officer asked in surprise.

'I can that, sir. I had two camels to look after at the London Zoo in Regent's Park. I was a keeper there, sir.'

The same officer walked down Shepheard's terrace steps one evening to join a number of Scottish soldiers who were watching a snake-charmer with complete fascination. He saw one of the

men stretch out his hand to grab a snake which the charmer had just returned to his basket. 'For God's sake man, don't touch it!' he shouted. The kilted soldier withdrew his hand and looked up with surprise. 'Sorry, sir, I didn't mean any harm. I just wanted to hold the beast. I've never seen such a creature in Aberdeen.'

Shaking his head, the officer retraced his steps back to the terrace where he joined two well-known Cairencs who were sipping their coffee. As he ordered a drink, one of them bent forward and said laughingly, 'Don't let anything surprise you here. We have just had an unusual experience too. Two young officers were sitting at the table in the corner and we suddenly realized that they were speaking a strange language we had never heard. We talk twelve languages between us but simply could not understand one solitary word. Finally I walked over to the young men and asked in French what nationality they were. Do you know what they replied?'

'I've no idea,' laughed the officer.

'My dear chap, they were WELSH!'

Adaptable as always, the British Tommies settled down under the bright sun of Egypt as if they had lived beneath its rays all their lives. Numerous committees were formed to put on entertainments for them, to help the Red Cross and organize canteens. Houses and hotels were turned into hospitals. Social life changed little in Cairo, but spy and counter-spy stories were rife.

Obvious spies hung round the hotel bars, spending money lavishly and asking leading questions; but those who did not fit into this category were difficult to spot, and it was in the dining-room at Shepherd's that a flying-officer met a spy—a lady. Naturally, he did not know she was one at the time for she was quite different to the glamorous spies he had read about. She was old, very distinguished-looking and with snow-white hair. It was rumoured she was a Central European baroness who had married into an Egyptian family. She dined alone most evenings, but always in great style.

One night, the officer was dining with another member of his squadron when a message was brought to their table inviting them

to join the baroness for a glass of brandy when they had finished their dinner. Feeling rather flattered, they accepted. She turned out to be a very charming woman and asked if either of them had served with her nephew, who had been killed in action with a certain squadron she named.

'Oh, no,' one officer said, 'we belong to squadron so-and-so.'

'Oh, really!' she exclaimed, 'I've heard my nephew speak of it. Don't you fly some sort of aircraft called a Camel?'

'Good heavens, no!' came the laughing reply. 'We have something much faster than camels—S.E.5s.'

It never dawned on the young men that a sinister character would call on the old baroness later that night and be given the information that squadron so-and-so had been re-equipped with S.E.5s.

Shortly afterwards, orders were issued forbidding British officers to accept invitations from the innocent-looking baroness.

Ladies dining alone like the baroness were treated with great deference by Shephard's head waiter. He helped them decide on tempting dishes and took even greater trouble with the wine list. The wine was then produced with great ceremony at exactly the right temperature. This was in sharp contrast to the butler's behaviour at the British Residency. Jones had recently come from the Embassy in Constantinople and had rigid ideas about women drinking wine—especially if they were unmarried. Ladies being entertained at the Residency for the first time were astonished, when offered wine by their host, to find their wine-glasses resolutely filled with barley water by the dignified Jones whose expression was such that they dared not rebel.

A well-known officer's prank at Shephard's was to appear in the dining-room disguised as a waiter. The manager frowned on this practice but was occasionally prevailed upon to countenance it. One practical joker had a large wager with his friends that he would appear at a fancy-dress ball completely unrecognizable. He came dressed as a waiter and, since he promised the management he would behave in exactly the same way as the hotel waiters, the staff agreed to help him. He was getting away with his disguise

when he accidentally spilt soup in someone's lap and was compelled to disclose his identity in order to calm down the resultant uproar.

That same night, another officer, who had imbibed too freely at the ball, fired his revolver out of his bedroom window for fun and next day found himself charged with the attempted murder of a couple of lovers in the garden!

Some of the Australian and New Zealand forces who arrived in Cairo bivouacked in the grounds of Mena House and had their mess in its annexe. Their pay had accumulated during their long voyage to the Middle East and they were free with their money, squandering gold sovereigns like water. It was reckoned that they spent between three and four thousand pounds a day in the capital. One and all wished to visit Shepherd's—and most of them did.

Shepherd's was called 'Home from Home' by many Australians, and certainly, despite their pranks, they did the hotel a good turn in an unorthodox way. There were several houses of ill-fame embarrassingly near the hotel, and before the Australians departed for Gallipoli some of them who felt they had various scores to settle with the proprietors of these places, proceeded to raid them in no uncertain manner. Furniture, not to mention scantily dressed ladies, were thrown downstairs or pitched out of windows, and then the buildings were set alight. The fires were soon under control but did enough damage to cause the houses to be demolished and an eyesore was temporarily removed from the vicinity of the hotel.

One military policeman was horrified to find an Australian private, not only in Shepherd's, which was reserved for officers, but drinking pretty steadily in the Long Bar. It took him some time to drive home the enormity of the crime. When it finally sank in, the soldier, convinced of his depravity, agreed to leave without fuss. As he passed through the Moorish Hall he was confronted with a sea of officers' faces. He had been caught transgressing and he was determined not to transgress further; the effect of his drinking had not dulled his memory, and he recalled the military

regulations on the saluting of officers. He drew himself up to attention, turned on his heel to the left and saluted smartly ten times, bringing his hand down to his side with a resounding slap each time. Before the policeman could hustle him out, the soldier nimbly stepped to the right, drew to attention once again and saluted fifteen times, then walked a few paces forward, faced more officers, and started saluting again.

'Hurry up! Hurry up!' said the exasperated policeman, 'you've got to get out of here.'

'All in good time, my boy,' replied the Australian cheerfully, 'my pal, Archie Murray, has given me strict instructions to salute every officer I meet and I'm bloody well going to do it!' He did, and it took an interminable time to reach the revolving door at the hotel entrance.

One of the many British subalterns who idled an hour or two away on Shepheard's terrace whenever he had time was Frederick Peake of the 4th Battalion of Infantry at Abbassia. He had served in India and, being a gifted linguist, had mastered Urdu, Persian and Pushtu, all of which were to serve him well when Indian detachments joined the Arab army against the Turks. The year before the war he had requested a transfer to the Egyptian army. Kitchener had taken a liking to the young man and felt he would go far but could not have foreseen that he was to play a distinguished rôle with Lawrence in Emir Feisal's army—or that within a few short years he would become Peake Pasha, leader of the Arab Legion in Trans-Jordan.

As a subaltern, Peake worried little about the future and when off duty gave himself up to the gaieties of social life, like other young men of his age.

There was an order that British officers in Cairo Military District must wear mess-kit when dining or dancing at any of the hotels. This dated back to a Christmas party at Shepheard's when subalterns—rightly or wrongly—had been accused of climbing a Christmas tree in the Moorish Hall and causing a lot of damage. Kitchener had then issued the order so that anyone misbehaving in uniform could be sternly reprimanded. However so many Allied

and Imperial officers were in Cairo that it was delicately suggested to the General Officer Commanding in Egypt that the order might be rescinded for the duration of hostilities: junior officers felt conspicuous in their red and gold trappings among the newcomers in their everyday khaki. The suggestion was ignored.

Peake was at a dance at Shepherd's one night when the matter came to a head. Together with some fellow officers and their partners, he was sitting on the terrace during a dance interval when one of the most senior officers in the Egyptian Army came out of the front entrance in splendid and impeccable mess-kit, and majestically strode down the terrace steps. It happened that two Australian soldiers were strolling by. They stopped, awestruck by the magnificent figure. One soldier looked at the other and ejaculated: 'Look George, there goes the bloody bandmaster!'

The order was rescinded next day.

After the drabness of the battlefield, officers on leave were delighted with the lavish oriental décor of Shepherd's. The entrance hall with its elegant columns, vividly painted in apricot, russet and turquoise and crowned with carved lotus blossoms, copied from those of Karnak Temple; the Moorish Hall, its inner walls divided by great arabesque arches from floor to ceiling, the comfortable divans, the thick, rich carpets and the broad staircase curving its way upward. They gave an air of opulence and security.

Most famous, or infamous, were the lifesize statues of two ebony maidens at the foot of the main staircase, whose curves measured far more than those of the beauty queens of today. They wore Egyptian head-dresses and held their heads high. Swathed draperies hung below their ample waists but their thrusting breasts were bare. Each maiden held plump arms above her head and clasped an electric torch in one hand.

That these ladies survived two world wars was astonishing, for they suffered some rough handling. On occasions they were dressed in the most astonishing clothes and carried off to bedrooms by exuberant young men; but they remained as unmindful of their fate as the Sphinx herself. It has been remarked that these lusty-

looking maidens were more impressive than some of the hotel habitués. This comment was certainly justified when unsmiling humans, suffering from severe hangovers, made their way slowly and painfully to the Long Bar for a 'pick-me-up'.

At Shephard's, New Year's Eve was treated solemnly by the Scots, as it is everywhere in the world, and they invariably brought their haggis along to be eaten with their dinner. No doubt due to the long sea voyage, the haggis seemed to need an uncommonly large amount of whisky to wash it down!

British women did not appear in the ballroom in uniform as they were to do some thirty years later. Although they worked hard during the day in hospitals or at other war jobs, they changed into pretty clothes when off duty, and to be chic was considered all-important. That well-known woman traveller Gertrude Bell—who was renowned for her elegance—still found it necessary, when she arrived at Shephard's, to wire her mother in England asking for more clothes.

I telegraphed to you this morning after my arrival and asked you to send me by Lady B. another gown and skirt.

She had been sent to Egypt by the War Office to place her comprehensive knowledge of the tribes of Northern Arabia at the disposal of those who were directing the desert fighting, but there were brief spells from her engrossing work when she joined in the social whirl.

Extracts from other letters of Gertrude Bell<sup>1</sup> read:

CAIRO,

13th December 1915

The days pass quickly here. I am quite happy and beginning to feel a little more as if I were getting hold of things. . . . I have an Arabic lesson from 8.15 to 9.30 then I walk up to the office and work at 'tribes' or annotate telegrams—the latter is great fun. Back to lunch and then to the office again and I seldom get home before 7 . . . but usually I dine here with Col.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *The Letters of Gertrude Bell* (Ernest Benn, London, 1933).



Wright, Mr. Lawrence and a party of people; we all share the same table. And it is not until after dinner that I go back to Arabic and do a little work for the next morning. I wonder if you sent me out a purple evening chiffon gown by Lady Brasse, I telegraphed for it but I haven't heard anything of it or her yet, also a new white skirt from Ospovat which I found I hadn't got. I am rather short of clothes for a prolonged stay in Cairo. It is heavenly weather—almost too nice for wartime I feel . . .

I rather wish I had brought out more clothes. Could you possibly send out to me the blue shot silk gown with a little coat and its own hat trimmed with feathers and if you are buying anything I should like too, the purple satin gown with the cape—Marie knows which I mean—and a mauve parasol. I have lots I know. . . . Both gowns would fold up so small that they could almost be sent by letter post. . . . I should be very very grateful—the sooner the better.

So Cairo continued its gay life. Martial law was imposed with moderation. The awful death-roll in Europe sometimes cast a gloom that even the Egyptian sun could not banish; but young soldiers on leave in Cairo did not think of war. The sportsman was in his element; for early risers there was hacking, swimming or shooting before breakfast. At the turn of the century the Khedive had presented land to the officers of the British Army so that they might have their own grounds for polo and golf, and the Gezireh Sporting Club became one of the finest of its kind in the world; there was something to suit all tastes, tennis, squash, cricket and croquet, a magnificent swimming-pool and a delightful club house.

One wing-commander talking of those days said nostalgically:

We always saved our pay for our leaves in Cairo. I loved staying at Shepherd's so I invariably booked ahead. I would arrive in the evening and have a drink at the Long Bar. After a bath—and what large old-fashioned deep baths Shepherd's

had—I would dress for dinner and join a party of my friends to dance and dine until early morning. As the dawn came up we would ride out to Mena House for an early morning swim in the swimming-pool, then go into the hotel for a large breakfast before going out to the desert to shoot. I would ride back to Shephard's for lunch and then take a siesta. I would awaken to find a *safragi* by my bedside with a refreshing tray of tea, then I would go sightseeing for an hour or so before starting the same round all over again.

Tradition has it that after the evacuation of the Dardanelles there were over 200 generals staying at Shephard's, and each demanded a private bathroom; an impossible request since there were only 270 bathrooms in all for the hotel's 550 bedrooms. A number of these terrifying gentlemen not only wanted a bath of their own but, when the time came for their daily ablutions, expected to find it ready and the water at exactly the right temperature.

Much excitement was caused one morning when one of the generals not only had to prepare his own bath but had to walk down a corridor to a public bathroom to do so. Once ensconced behind the locked door, he discovered to his chagrin that he had forgotten half his washing-gear, so, leaving the bath water running and his towel and sponge behind, he walked back to his bedroom to fetch it.

On his return he found the door locked against him and the sound of the taps being turned off. Discordant strains of *A hunting we will go*, sung in a deep bass voice, assailed his ears and were accompanied by sounds of somebody thoroughly enjoying a good hot bath. The general shook the door and shouted to the occupier to come out immediately. The volume of singing increased. Such a din resulted, that people began to collect in the corridor to see what the ear-splitting noise was about. The general stood his ground and, beside himself with rage, waited for the culprit to appear.

When the door opened he was confronted by an elderly gentle-

man with a white moustache. The general gave vent to his wrath in no uncertain terms, while the other man's face slowly turned purple and he yelled:

'What the devil do you mean, sir, by putting your damned towel and sponge in my bathroom?'

'Are you aware, sir, that I am a brigadier-general?' shouted the other.

'Are you aware, sir, that I am a general myself?'

The angry tirade continued, but history does not relate the outcome.

Officers, one and all, enjoyed their leaves at Shepherd's—even that famed recluse, Lawrence of Arabia, would spend a day or so at the hotel to rest after the rigours of his desert life. He preferred to remain incognito and as soon as people began to point him out he vanished as quickly as he had appeared. He used different names so that even the manager himself would often not know he had come until he had gone. Yet sometimes Lawrence would take coffee in the Moorish Hall dressed in full Arab regalia, a place where most Arab heads of state avoided attention by wearing European clothes. Inevitably, visitors were intrigued by the bronzed Arab with the vivid blue eyes and asked who he might be. When another well-known woman explorer, Rosita Forbes, who knew Lawrence's desire to conceal his identity, asked him one day why he was wearing an 'abba' and head-dress in such a conspicuous place he hissed: 'I don't want to be recognized.' Exactly how much Lawrence abhorred publicity in his innermost heart it is difficult to say. Certainly he did not hesitate to sign the Golden Book when asked and he continued to stay at Shepherd's Hotel on his brief visits to Cairo, a place where it was impossible for a famous man to remain unnoticed.

Lawrence had a biting wit and, when in Cairo one time and wishing to avoid the curious onlookers on Shepherd's terrace, he went with Sir Ronald Storrs to the Continental for a cooling drink on a very hot morning. An elderly woman, realizing that the short, fair young man was the famous T. E. Lawrence and being anxious to be seen talking to him, fanned herself violently

with a newspaper, rushed over to where he stood, and said breathlessly: 'Just think, Colonel Lawrence, ninety-two—ninety-two!' Lawrence gave her a twisted smile and replied gravely with a bow, 'Many happy returns of the day!'

Towards the end of the war, the Duke of Connaught visited Palestine, ostensibly to confer the Grand Cross of the Order of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem on General Allenby, but also to present a decoration to Lawrence for his leadership of the Arab revolt against the Turks with Prince Feisal. Frantic messages sent to the desert failed to produce the elusive Lawrence and it was only after the Duke's departure that he casually strolled in through the Turkish lines to report. The Duke was now in Egypt. Knowing how averse Lawrence was from accepting medals and military honours, his friends on the Intelligence Staff succeeded in getting him to Cairo on some plausible excuse but without letting the cat out of the bag. He checked in at Shepherd's, where unfortunately a young subaltern inadvertently let him know that the real reason for his visit was the investiture. He reacted more quickly than a stag at bay. He left the hotel immediately, even leaving his uniform behind in his bedroom in his haste to be away. He dashed off to the Flying Corps Headquarters at Heliopolis, where nothing was known about the reason for his appearance in Cairo, and hurriedly flew back to the wastes of Arabia.

Shepherd's hotel continued to appeal to Lawrence and many years later he was to write to Lord Lloyd when commenting on his book *Egypt since Cromer*.<sup>1</sup>

My statement, when they offered me the succession to Allenby, was that I'd shut up the Residency, except as offices, take a room at Shepherd's, and ride about Cairo and the Delta on my motor-bike; and yet 'run' the government of Egypt, from underneath.<sup>2</sup>

Armistice Day in 1918 was celebrated at Shepherd's in memorable fashion. The hotel was crowded and the popping of champagne corks made such a bombardment of sound that it was

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan, London, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> *Lawrence of Arabia* by Richard Aldington. Collins, London, 1955.

difficult to believe the war was over. Added to this, the wide staircase was the scene of a pitched battle between the Yeomanry and the Australians, the ammunition being pillows, mattresses and anything else that could be thrown by hand. One neutral observer walking past the bottom of the staircase found the badges of rank torn off his shoulder by a perfectly aimed three-foot pot, complete with plant. It had been hurled through the air from three stories above by an Australian V.A.D.

Armistice night was nothing compared with the noisy hilarity of the following Christmas when a more international gathering than usual was joined by numerous officers. All three services seemed to be on leave. As so often before, parties spilled out into the passages and halls, yet the staff with unfailing skill managed to produce an excellent Christmas dinner for everybody.

Before the port had been passed round many people were standing on the tables. The manager remonstrated, and was promptly rolled up in a carpet and placed in a corner of the dining-room.

A twenty-foot-high Christmas tree stood in the middle of the Moorish Hall and a football game was soon in progress at its base. Some 200 players used a policeman's hat as a football. The tree had been denuded of gifts, but its bareness was scarcely noticeable when subaltern officers climbed up among its branches. The tree oscillated unsteadily, then crashed down into the football game.

The pillow-fight on Armistice night had not been forgotten and, to the blood-stirring sounds of hunting-horns, it started afresh. The Anzac Brigade attacked the Yeomanry once more, and again ammunition was supplied by V.A.D.s and nursing sisters who raided any unlocked bedrooms for supplies. In a short time the stairway looked as if a snowstorm had swept over it.

Revellers left with the dawn, but such was the resiliency of the hotel personnel that by breakfast-time all signs of the previous night's roistering had miraculously vanished.

## 9

### Aftermath of War

THE aftermath of war found trouble brewing in the Middle East. Trans-Jordan became a British Mandate and Frederick Peake was one of the British Army officers appointed to form a police force for the maintenance of public security. At the same time, as a result of the San Remo Conference and the Peace of Versailles, France was a mandatory power in Syria. Arab officials, dismissed by the French in Syria, tried to climb on the band-wagon in the new state of Trans-Jordan and sought posts in the capital. France was openly accusing Britain of interfering in her Syrian policy by giving help to Syrian rebels. Britain was doing her utmost to avoid this; but with Trans-Jordanians siding with the rebels the situation was in a state of flux. The Zionist movement was pulling Palestine asunder, violence was rife in Iraq, Arab states were being formed and reformed and Ibn Saud was trying his strength in central Arabia.

In March 1921, the British Colonial Secretary, Mr. Winston Churchill, came to Egypt to hold what was to be called the Cairo Conference. It was attended by T. E. Lawrence, now Arab adviser to the Colonial Office, Sir Percy Cox the High Commissioner of Iraq, Sir Herbert Samuel from Palestine, Captain Peake from Trans-Jordan and other officers and officials who lived in the troublesome territories.

Peake, accompanied by his personal bodyguard, Ahmed Salem, stayed at Shephard's Hotel.

On the third day of the meeting the subject of Trans-Jordan came up. It so happened that just when Peake rose to give an account of affairs in that country, he was handed a telegram which read, 'The Emir Abdulla entered Amman today'.

It had been rumoured in the Mousky that the Emir Abdulla would come to Trans-Jordan from Mecca to raise an Arab force

against the French in Syria. In fact, he arrived for no such reason but Peake had no idea what the Emir's actual intentions were. Churchill, with his usual verve, decided, on Lawrence's advice who knew the Emir well, that a personal meeting with Abdulla would cut out all red tape and enable them to find a reasonable solution. So the future Prime Minister of England met the future King of Trans-Jordan. The Emir undertook to quell hostility towards the French and Churchill agreed that Great Britain would pay a yearly subsidy to Trans-Jordan. As Lawrence put it in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*:<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Winston Churchill was entrusted by our harassed Cabinet with the settlement of the Middle East, and in a few weeks, at his conference in Cairo, he made straight all the tangle, finding solutions fulfilling (I think) our promise in letter and spirit (where humanly possible) without sacrificing any interest of our Empire or any interest of the peoples concerned.

While history was being made, Ahmed Salem, Peake's body-guard, was enjoying himself at Shepherd's. He belonged to a semi-nomad tribe from the hill country west of Amman and was so utterly devoted to Peake that he eventually came to England with him. Although he spoke some five languages and had travelled extensively in the desert, he had never seen such an establishment as Shepherd's Hotel. Most men from the desert found the lifts fascinating beyond belief, but Ahmed was enraptured with the large rotating door leading to the terrace and would stand for hours watching it revolve. Tall, handsome, and straight as a ramrod, Ahmed, in his glamorous Arab head-dress and uniform, fascinated the visiting tourists. He made friends with everybody and became a familiar figure during his master's stay. He loved motor-vehicles and the hall-porter usually contrived to get him a seat next to the various drivers who took guests to see the Pyramids; Ahmed lent an Eastern tone to the parties and everyone was delighted. These jaunts gave Ahmed the idea that he could sit next to the driver of any motor-car that drew up outside

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Cape, London, 1950 edition.

Shepherd's and Peake was astonished one day to see him sitting in the front of Mr. Churchill's car with the chauffeur. Peake hurried down the steps to remonstrate with him but Mr. Churchill, a smile on his face, insisted that Ahmed should remain.

Many years later Ahmed Salem would recount with veneration how he had driven in the same car as the future Prime Minister of England.

Before the Cairo conference began, there was much excitement in Cairo over a noteworthy event in air history, and one of the participants, Sir Chalmers Mitchell was staying at Shepherd's Hotel. Captains Cockerell and Broome were grooming an aircraft at Heliopolis for the first Cairo-to-Cape flight, but engine trouble held up the take-off for the better part of a week. When the great day arrived, there were crowds of well-wishers and newspaper correspondents at the airport to wish the flight Godspeed. Sir Chalmers Mitchell clambered aboard clutching two things, a large luncheon packet from Shepherd's and a white slipper, which had been given to him by the wife of *The Times* correspondent, as a good-luck token.

Once airborne, the passengers scanned the earth below through field-glasses, watching the pyramids gradually grow smaller and the lush green of the delta suddenly give way to the gold of the desert. On and on they flew, with the aeroplane's shadow skimming the sandy wastes beneath them. As midday approached, Sir Chalmers Mitchell untied the large luncheon packet. It contained sandwiches and a bottle of claret and he passed them round his companions. So it came about that Shepherd's Hotel, first in the field in so many things, supplied the first luncheon on the first air journey from Cairo to the Cape.

The sequence of events which led to the signing of the Versailles Treaty had fanned the desire for independence in the breasts of many Egyptians. Politics had lain dormant during the war, but Saad Zaghlul, whom Lord Cromer had predicted would have a great future, was now Vice-President of the Egyptian Assembly and vigorously protested against the British Protectorate. Negotiations began which were wearisomely long on both sides but



finally Zaghlul and some of his colleagues went to England to discuss the Milner Proposals.

Rumours of Zaghlul's success spread to Egypt, where it was assumed he had reached complete agreement with the British, though it was not actually agreement but rather an outline on which agreement might subsequently be reached. However, when Zaghlul returned to Egypt, he was hailed as a national hero. A banquet was given in his honour in Alexandria and, when he left the railway station for Cairo the following day, he was seen off by a wildly excited crowd. It was the beginning of a triumphal journey. Enthusiastic masses lined the track all along the route, shouting and cheering. Men even threw themselves in front of the engine in order to stop the train and catch a glimpse of their hero. Ovations greeted him at every station and, when he arrived in the capital, it was to find thronging crowds, tramcars decorated with bunting and flowers, bands playing and dancing in the streets.

A banquet for some five hundred people was given for the hero at Shepherd's. When he rose to speak there was much cheering but, as his speech continued, it slowly dawned on his listeners that he had not gained self-government for Egypt. The atmosphere changed in a moment. Students, who had wormed their way into the hotel to applaud him, began to get restive, and an angry undercurrent slowly made itself felt. It was obvious that an ugly situation was developing. The hotel manager saw what might happen and, just when lynching seemed inevitable, quickly ordered the waiters to get Zaghlul out of the dining-room. Strong arms passed him through the exit and he was unceremoniously rushed into the manager's office and the door was locked. The manager hurriedly sent a code message over the telephone and in a short space of time forty British Military Police appeared in the hotel and their presence quickly restored order.

Meanwhile Zaghlul, a bottle of champagne which someone had solicitously opened for him at his elbow, was still in the manager's office. He was visibly shaken by the turn of events. When the noise had quietened down he was smuggled out through the hotel's back entrance.

There was much to admire about Zaghlul, not least his great love of animals. It is told that he was invited to a bullfight in a Spanish town and was so overcome by what he saw, he left his host abruptly, but not before telling him exactly what he thought of such a pastime. One of his favourite remarks was that 'Animals cannot talk, but they understand; humans can talk but often do not understand.'

Zaghlul was a born orator. He vacillated at times but had a staunch supporter in his wife, the daughter of Mustapha Fahmy Pasha, a former Prime Minister. When Zaghlul was in exile his wife acted as go-between with his followers and her counsel was always wise and decisive. Zaghlul's party held her in great esteem, but after his death she retired from public life. Indirectly, Madame Zaghlul rendered great service to feminism in Egypt.

Disorders were serious in the early twenties and a number of assassinations of British nationals brought things to a head in the form of a meeting at Shepherd's Hotel at which 1,500 members of the British community were present. One of the direct results of this meeting was that everyone must carry a revolver. People not already armed could secure a weapon from the British Consulate. A lighter side to the emergency was the story of a gentleman who, after collecting his revolver, accidentally shot himself through the foot as he was walking down the steps of the consulate. It is said that the street emptied immediately.

The bitter indignation felt by both British and Egyptians gradually died down.

There was one subject uppermost in almost everyone's mind in November 1922—and not only in Egypt—for one of the greatest treasure troves of modern times was being uncovered in the Valley of the Kings—the golden royal trappings of Pharaoh Tutankhamen. The work had been financed by Lord Carnarvon and, when Dr. Howard Carter made the discovery, he refused to enter the new subterranean passage until Lord Carnarvon and Lord Allenby, special High Commissioner for Egypt, were present. Excitement was tense when, holding a torch in one hand, Carter entered the tomb. Lord Carnarvon, waiting outside could not bear

the suspense and called out to ask Carter what he had found. The reply came back, 'Marvels! Marvels!'

It took some time before the amazing discoveries could be unearthed. The tomb was small, judging by ancient Egyptian standards, and everything was huddled together so that the greatest care had to be taken to see nothing should be damaged.

These remarkable relics started a craze for collecting ancient Egyptian *objets d'art* which has never ceased. Fantastic mementoes immediately appeared in the bazaars and it was impossible to say what was genuine and what was not—save by an expert.

Tourists continued buying quantities of scarabs, necklaces and other trinkets, hoping their particular purchase might be the real thing.

On Shepherd's terrace guests showed each other their finds, *ushabtiu* figures, fine beads, necklaces and scent-bottles. There is no doubt that many of the trinkets were authentic, stolen from tombs long ago and passed from hand to hand—but hundreds more were fakes. Scarabs were produced from long galabias by sinister men and shown to guests just about to go up the hotel's steps and, whereas in the past such characters would have been brushed aside, the guest hesitated and began to bargain, knowing it was remotely possible that he might become the possessor of a scarab 3,000 years old. Gossip on the terrace ceased being of international crises and consisted entirely of what the Tutankhamen finds would be like and when it would be possible to see them. Those on a short visit hoped and prayed that the 'unveiling' would take place before their time came to leave.

The treasures were carefully packed and brought to the Cairo museum where a complete gallery was made ready to receive them. When the public was allowed in, a great hush fell on all who entered, for the treasures were such that, as with the Queen of Sheba, the half had not been told. At the entrance to the gallery stood two statues on guard, as they had in the Valley of the Kings outside the funerary chambers. They were replicas of the young King, with the same gentle expressions as the golden masks visitors were to see later. The eyelashes and eyebrows were golden

as were the short skirts and crowns. Inside, dazzling exhibits followed; golden chariots, beds and chairs, the King's daggers, the sheaths decorated with hunting-scenes, diadems, walking-sticks, gilded statues of deities, coffers, golden sarcophagi and masks. A special room was set aside for the King's jewels, his golden sandals and strange, gold nail-shields.

Perhaps the most pleasing of the Pharaoh's personal eating and drinking vessels was a drinking goblet of the finest alabaster. It was in the form of an opened lotus, the handles on either side being clinging lotus buds, and Dr. Carter had three copies made of it. One he kept for himself and one he gave to Marysal, manager of the Semiramis Hotel, the third he gave some years later to Wild Bey.

It was believed during the twenties that all those who had anything to do with the discovery and handling of the Tutankhamen treasures were under a curse of sudden death. Although this did not seem to affect Carter, many people connected with the discovery did die quickly and in unusual circumstances; in particular Lord Carnarvon, who died of a mosquito bite. When Wild Bey heard that Marysal of the Semiramis had suddenly died he decided to get rid of his goblet and broke it into a thousand pieces.

The Mousky was doing a roaring trade as never before but its manners and customs did not change. Buying and selling had to be approached gradually and with the right degree of solemnity. Those who did not enter into the spirit of these negotiations missed something that gives flavour to oriental living. An Arab proverb says that 'haste is from the devil' and this was more than borne out by one merchant, who was approached by a tourist from Shepherd's who inquired the price of an inlaid copper-tray of beautiful design which stood on a high shelf. The merchant was sitting cross-legged, enjoying his hubble-bubble pipe. 'Would you mind entering into negotiations for it the next time you are this way, sir? For the moment it is out of reach and, as you will notice, I am sitting down enjoying my pipe. Next time you are passing I shall perhaps be standing.' Laughing, the would-be purchaser went on his way.

Another guest at Shepherd's, an R.A.F. wing-commander, after much haggling bought a long robe, an abba, from one of the ven-

dors outside the hotel. It was pure silk and embroidered with gold thread, and negotiations had been carried on between the buyer and seller for some days. Each was satisfied with the final transaction and when his holiday was over, the wing-commander returned to his base in Amman, well content with his new acquisition.

During his next leave he stayed at Shepherd's again and while strolling back to the hotel one night was approached by the same merchant: 'Good evening, sir! I now have a better abba than I sold you last time. Perhaps you would be interested in buying it?' The wing-commander thought for a few minutes and decided the new abba would be a suitable present to take back to England with him. 'Let me see it,' he said. It was, as the merchant had said, an even nicer abba than the former had been. Bargaining began.

'You ask too much.'

'No, sir. It is quite beautiful, feel it. Besides, sir, I have a new wife and she's very extravagant. Before when I sell to you I have not the wife and I ask less.'

'You rascal! You started with the same sum last time. I paid you far too much.' So day followed day and the good-natured banter continued. The wing-commander was suddenly recalled to England, and he hurriedly made arrangements to leave Cairo the following morning.

As he was going into the hotel that evening the familiar voice of the merchant spoke out of the shadows.

'I have to return to England tomorrow my man,' said the wing-commander tersely. 'Either you sell me the abba for £10 or I will not have it at all.' The man disappeared.

The following morning the merchant was waiting as the wing-commander was coming down the steps to his taxi which was to take him to the station.

'Sir, here is the abba, beautifully wrapped as you see. It can be placed with your luggage. I will forget the extravagance of my new wife and let you have the abba for the £10 you mentioned.' The wing-commander was delighted. It was a bargain and he gave the merchant the money.

The parcel was beautifully wrapped as the merchant had said

and the wing-commander was so busy making last-minute arrangements before he caught his ship, that it was not until he was half-way back to England that he decided to open the parcel. It contained an abba—but not the beautiful one he had bargained for.

If someone wanted change to pay a taxi, money to pay a vendor, or cash for a night out in the town, the man to approach was Shephard's Italian barman, Gasperini. He was short, olive-skinned and wore a benign smile. He was always lending money and his great boast was that he invariably got it back. He knew, by a quick glance, whom he could trust with a few pounds and during his many years as barman his 'hunches' were always right. He was downcast when he thought he had been let down on one occasion. It was not the debt that worried him, because the sum involved was a mere five pounds, but if he did not get it back his proud boast would no longer be true. It was a young captain who owed him the money and he had not returned to the hotel since he had borrowed it—but some months later Gasperini received a registered letter from England; it was from the captain apologizing for keeping Gasperini waiting for his money and folded inside the notepaper was a crisp five-pound note.

Gasperini presided over the Long Bar at the back of Shephard's where, until the last war, ladies were only allowed in on New Year's Eve. He seemed to be on duty twenty-four hours a day. Early in the morning he was still standing behind the bar, but at this time of day his cherubic face wore not the exuberant grin of the night before, but a smile full of compassion for those now coming in to partake of his famous pick-me-up, a tasty type of Seidlitz powder which he called a 'Corpse Reviver'. A ritual was gone through whereby the sufferer would lean over the bar and Gasperini would tie a large white linen table-napkin round his neck, gently push the patient down on a stool and then quickly whisk up a 'Corpse Reviver' which, fizzling like a hot spring, was hastily poured down the sufferer's throat, while flecks of white froth were sopped up by the napkin. The patient would gasp for breath and Gasperini would bend forward, gently wipe his client's mouth with the end of the napkin, untie it and prepare for the next victim.

One evening, a newcomer to the Long Bar, a subaltern, was drinking a whisky and soda and soon got into conversation with an elderly, rather suave gentleman next to him. He admitted he had only just arrived in Cairo, and mentioned how fascinating he found everything to be. The elderly man was delighted.

'What are you doing tonight my boy?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'Well, you must come back to my house for dinner and then I will show you round the city.'

The lieutenant thought how lucky he was to meet such a charming man the first night he was at Shepherd's and accepted the invitation.

The elderly man led him through the Moorish Hall and across the terrace and clapped his hands. A porter immediately whistled-up an enormous Rolls Royce and the two men were handed in. The car purred along the streets of Cairo and drew up at a palatial building. The young man was led up marble steps and inside. Uniformed servants bowed right and left as the elderly man led his guest into a large drawing-room. He clapped his hands. A major-domo appeared and there was a long discussion in Arabic, then turning and smiling at his guest the elderly man said, 'I am very particular about my food, but I have ordered a dinner I think you will enjoy. Now what were you drinking at Shepherd's? Whisky and soda wasn't it?'

The dinner was delicious, but try as he might, the lieutenant did not succeed in getting the conversation round to finding out anything about his host, and he was beginning to feel apprehensive. After dinner he asked if he might have a wash and a *safragi* showed him into a beautiful bathroom of black marble. He gazed at himself in a bevelled mirror and decided the time had come for escape. His thoughts were centred morbidly round such things as kidnapping, hashish parties or being mistaken for someone else. He bolted for the front entrance, tore into the street and hailed a passing horse-and-carriage. He found comfort in its musty leathery smell and quickly ordered the cab to take him to Shepherd's.

Once back in the hotel he felt too keyed up to go to his room,

so went into the Long Bar and told Gasperini what had happened. The little Italian laughed until tears came into his eyes. 'My dear young man,' he gasped, wiping his face with one of his every-ready white napkins, 'you need have no fear. The gentleman is most respectable although he is very rich. He has the concession for making cigarettes in Egypt and he has no other thought than that of entertaining you. He enjoys showing people Cairo, and would have given you a wonderful evening.' 'What am I to do now?' asked the young lieutenant ruefully. 'I think the best thing to do', and here Gasperini's voice took on a conspiratorial note, 'is for me to telephone the gentleman and say that you had been taken ill suddenly and felt that you had better return to the hotel. You can write and thank him for his dinner tomorrow.'

One of Gasperini's favourites at the Long Bar was Wall—the Canadian V.C. Wall strolled into the bar one morning after a sightseeing excursion to find that he was being followed by a beautifully groomed yellow retriever. The dog refused to leave his side and Wall asked Gasperini to give it a drink. The retriever lapped up some water and, looking up at Wall with adoring eyes, stretched out at his feet. Wall fondled the dog, which steadfastly refused to leave him. After a while he decided he would take his new companion for a walk. He had not got very far when a huge Hispano Suiza drew up alongside him and a tall Sudanese guard got out, armed with a dagger, closely followed by a small boy who rushed up to Wall shouting. 'You have my dog! You have my dog!' It was Prince Farouk. The dog bounded back to his young master completely forgetting the hospitality he had received and left Wall V.C. open-mouthed on the pavement.

When Gasperini made enough money to retire—some £25,000—he returned to his beloved Italy and bought the lovely villa he had always dreamed about and settled down to a quiet life. Unfortunately he did not live very long. There was a small fountain in his garden which played and bubbled in about six inches of water. Walking towards it one morning, he tripped and his head came down with such a bang on the rim of the fountain that he was concussed and drowned in the water.



## IO

### Kings and Princes

IN the twenties a well-known Alexandrian hotel proprietor remarked acidly: 'Alexandria is nothing more than a signal stop on the tourist road to Shepheard's.'

Publicity evolved round the hotel without any effort on the part of the management. As a leading newspaper pointed out: 'Shepheard's is an hotel. It must be because it provides beds, sells food and sticks labels on your luggage. But nobody thinks of it as an hotel or as anything but Cairo.'

The hotel still dominated the centre of the city from a visitor's point of view. It was a mere five minutes from the station. The small office Thomas Cook had set up in the garden in 1872 had been succeeded by a large modern building. Other travel agencies were close by. Shops, cafés, cinemas and the Royal Opera House were all within walking distance. The geographical position of Shepheard's in the town meant that, as one manager put it: 'Everything possible in life could happen there.' And most of them did.

A lady and her husband who had just returned from riding in the desert one evening, sat on the terrace and ordered tea. They looked idly across the street and saw a man in a ragged robe holding a chicken upside down and plucking its feathers off. The bird was squawking and making frantic efforts to escape as if it knew it was destined for the table. The lady promptly fainted. A waiter revived her with a glass of water and the husband angrily inquired where such a poorly clad man had come from. The waiter shrugged his shoulders. Little did the couple know that behind Shepheard's and bordering on its spacious gardens were huddled windowless houses where people lived in appalling squalor. Their meagre livestock, consisting of goats and chickens, had to be

tethered on the mud rooftops. This state of affairs was well hidden from view by a great lattice screen, some sixty feet high, interlaced with thick greenery, and visitors walking along the trim pathways—generously sprinkled with red sand—or among the towering royal palm-trees, sycamores and flowering shrubs were unaware of the different world which lay a few yards away. Occasionally a snake came over from the Arab quarter and slithered down the high screen. Nor was the prostitutes' quarter across the road hidden from view; it rarely failed to draw tourists—but mostly from curiosity. Also close by was a most unusual music-hall. It was named after the original owner, a Madame Bardia, and although each time it was improved or renovated the name was changed, it was always affectionately referred to as *The Bardia*. The stage and lighting equipment were comparable to any European theatre; its difference lay in the small loges lining the walls, fitted with comfortable chairs and tables, where members of the audience shut themselves behind waist-high wooden partitions and were served with food and coffee during the performance. The shows, which were of the singing and dancing variety, interspersed with playlets in Arabic or French, continued till the small hours of the morning, and during the long intervals the audience sauntered out into Opera Square or went to Shepheard's terrace for drinks.

Business tycoons found Shepheard's own post office on the ground floor of inestimable value, for it remained open day and night. It benefited the hotel in more ways than one, for the postal staff sorted all incoming letters, thereby saving hours of work for the busy clerks at the reception desk. Egyptian stamps have always been popular with philatelists and those in special demand have a 'Shepheard's Hotel' mark on them in English and Arabic.

Bulletins affecting the European community were pinned to a notice-board in the entrance hall each day. On it could be seen which houseboats were to be let, how many flats were vacant, when meetings were to be held at various clubs and at what times forthcoming social functions were to take place.

There is an Egyptian saying that 'time wears away even

marble', and this was certainly true of the terrace. The top step leading to it became so worn it had to be replaced. When finished, it was a shade higher than the other steps. Terrace habitués soon got used to this and remembered to lift their feet a fraction higher when they came to it, but newcomers often made their entrance with a slight stumble—much to the amusement of the spectators who placed bets as to who would or who would not do this!

Dragomen were not allowed to climb the steps to the terrace, and only two could wait below at a time. When one was hired, as if by magic, another appeared to take his place. They all had to pass a Government examination in Egyptian history, and many became sufficiently interested to continue their studies, and so became very knowledgeable. Always dignified, they had great presence and looked decorative in their spotless white turbans, long silken robes and brocaded shawls—the latter thrown over their shoulders with the grace expected of a couture house. Each dragoman carried a walking-stick which he used as a pointer when deciphering inscriptions.

Montenegrius acted as commissionaires for all large premises in Cairo and were scrupulously honest. Should one of their number digress one iota from their laws of trustworthiness he was put to death by the others. The Montenegrin doormen at Shepherd's wore scarlet and white uniforms with daggers at their sides. They took their job of guarding the hotel and its inhabitants with such seriousness that on an auspicious occasion in the foyer, one of them shot a man who, he thought, meant to bring harm to Charles Baehler.

Before people mounted the steps between these picturesque men they had to run the gauntlet of the street vendors, who tried to sell something to everybody. Although outrageously persistent they were very friendly and even when extolling the virtues of their polyglot wares with great seriousness, their faces were wreathed in smiles. They expected to be refused, but like the donkey-boys before them, retained an unrestrained cheerfulness and no one could be really angry with them. Many were weighed down with unsaleable articles which they carried around for

weeks, yet their merchandise remained spick and span. A few of them tried to sell livestock, but why a visitor going to Shepheard's might need a goat, a parrot or small fluffy chickens no one ever discovered. Anyone was fair game, whether a general in full uniform or someone dressed to go playing tennis, and no discrimination was shown in suitable wares for individuals. It seemed pointless to persuade someone, who already had an excellent fly-whisk in his hand, to buy another, yet endless energy would be used to just such a purpose. One of the well-known vendors hawked rolls of toilet-paper, which he hung together on a long piece of string. To negotiate such a sale needed a lot of gesticulation, so in order to keep both hands free for this, he would appear on the steps with the paper-rolls hanging around his neck like a gigantic necklace.

This toilet-roll man had a colleague who had to work the opposite way round. This man sold plants in pots, and he would walk very erect with one pot balanced on the top of his head and two more on the palm of each hand—which he held out on either side in a juggler's pose. No doubt passers-by gave him money for this balancing performance. He could not use his hands at all so he went about with a small boy who did the negotiating for him. When a sale had been arranged, he would kneel down in the road, and his tiny assistant would take the plant off his head, and replace it with a new one from a little trolley. Then the whole process would start afresh.

During the strawberry season one or two vendors would change their merchandise to this delectable fruit. The strawberries were arranged on trays in high pyramids, and balanced on the head like some Alice-in-Wonderland head-dress. One Swiss visitor swore he would never eat a strawberry in Egypt again and, when asked why, explained that he had watched with horrified fascination while a street vendor arranged his tray after carefully licking the berries one at a time, so that each should shine to advantage.

Three Swiss brothers called Meyer worked at Shepheard's; the eldest, Hans, joined the staff in 1900 as hall-porter. He was of youthful appearance but it was always understood that people

should keep a look-out for a suitable shop for him when he retired. Although this was discussed at great length, Hans could never bear to leave the hotel and was still there when it burnt down in 1952. He complained to the managers time and time again with tears in his eyes that he must have a raise in salary. They refused, knowing full well that Hans was making a fortune. One decided to teach Hans a lesson and retaliated by saying his own lot was a sorry one. He managed to squeeze out some tears as well so that Hans was forced to smile and, shrugging his shoulders, went back to his post. Hans used the money he made by buying apartment houses in Cairo and Switzerland and it was well known that he had several thousand pounds' worth of property. He was reserved and quiet by nature and had a phenomenal memory for names and faces. He always appeared unruffled no matter what happened.

One of Hans's brothers was the under-porter and the other was the luggage-porter. Not much went on at Shepherd's that the Meyer brothers did not know about.

There were several birds in the hotel garden which had been tamed and become pets, but these did not include a kite, the wild scavenger who constantly wheels overhead in the sky. The cry of the kite was always as much part of the kaleidoscope of Shepherd's as the aroma of fresh coffee at breakfast-time. People often tipped waiters to hold out food for the kites, and watched through the glass windows of the grill room while one of the great birds swooped down, grabbed the food in its claws and flew away again. The practice was frowned on by the management for obvious reasons. Half the fascination was because the birds looked like miniature eagles. One lunch-time a kite caused much amusement by ignoring the titbit offered to him and swung in a bemused circle towards the kitchens as if he had seen something better. It reappeared by soaring up into the air clutching a table-cloth from the laundry garden.

The kite's hooked beak gives him a distinguished air in spite of his piratical livelihood, and his spread wings shine like cornelian as he wheels in the sunlight. He and his mate are slaves to their

fledglings, who refuse to leave the nest until they are almost fully grown; so the search for food is endless. In Cairo the thin cry of the kite, plaintive and not unmusical, intermingles with the city's noises from dawn to dusk.

Charles Baehler never stinted Shepherd's in any of its furnishings, but its carpets were his special delight. They were Persian, of different sizes and thicknesses; Bokharas with bright 'elephant foot' designs in black and red; Kashans, distinguishable by their seven borders and brilliant entangled reds and blues; silken rugs from the plains and woven goat's wool Baluches in muted soft colours from the mountainous districts. A particularly beautiful carpet of heavy silk covered the small hall on the ground floor; it was a Shiraz with a deep red background and a multicoloured medallion in the centre which shone like a luminous painting. Many of the carpets were priceless and treated as such. It was not until the second world war that the barbarous habit of treading cigarettes out underfoot became widespread and did inestimable damage.

The Golden Books were now extremely valuable. By a happy thought the manager of the late twenties and thirties, Freddy Elwert, thought it would be interesting to keep a Golden Book of his own, so that when people signed one of the original ones they would sign his also. Although the famous ones have gone, Freddy's is still in existence. He took it with him to Switzerland when he left Shepherd's just before the second world war. It is a specially made volume with gilt-edged leaves, bound in blue leather and embossed with gold. Sometimes Freddy can be persuaded to show it at his Hotel Central in Zürich.

Among the fascinating signatures are:

The Prince of Wales, Duke of Gloucester, King Faisal of Iraq, The Aga Khan, Duke of Atholl, King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, King Albert, Queen Elizabeth of the Belgians, Queen Marie of Roumania, Princess Ileana, Crown Prince of Sweden, Doumergue, Lord Rothermere, Rudyard Kipling, Erik Prince of Denmark, ex-King Alfonso, Hubertus Prince of Prussia, Bernard

Shaw, Dr. Eckner (of Zeppelin fame), King and Queen of Italy, Princess Marie di Savoia, King Umberto, King Leopold of the Belgians, Prince of Leichtenstein, Duchessa d'Aosta, Princess Helena, Princess Feodora, General Smuts, Louis Crown Prince of Sweden, Bertil Prince of Sweden, Grand Duchess of Luxemburg, Barado ex-King and Queen of Siam, ex-King Peter of Yugoslavia, Bishop of London, de Valera, Haile Selassie, Maharajah of Jodhpur, Auchinleck and Winston Churchill.

As in the original Golden Books, a page here and there bears a single illustrious name. King Alfonso's signature is one that fills an entire page in large flowing script, so does that of ex-King Ferdinand of Bulgaria. The latter booked the same suite of rooms each year on the first floor. He was tall and thin with white hair and beard. Gregarious by nature, he enjoyed discussing racing with Charles Baehler and chatting with Freddy Elwert. Freddy always treated the old man with great deference and called him 'Your Majesty'.

'Ah,' sighed the King sadly one morning, 'not many people call me that nowadays.'

Ferdinand's niece, a charming girl, usually came to Shepherd's with him. One morning Ferdinand woke with a feverish cold and she went to fetch the hotel doctor who was a Swiss. When the doctor came, he was uncertain how to address his royal patient. They spoke German together and to get over the difficulty the doctor called him 'Majesty' and inquired if this was correct. Ferdinand smiled and said, 'I am used to any situation in life so don't worry about etiquette.' At the end of the visit the two men fell to discussing international medical books and Ferdinand promised to send a copy of one the doctor had not seen. It arrived at Shepherd's some weeks after Ferdinand had left and the doctor was delighted on opening it to find a dedication written by the ex-King inside the fly-leaf.

One season before coming to Shepherd's the elderly Ferdinand, who was extremely active for his years, went off on an African safari to take photographs of wild animals. Photography was his

favourite hobby and when he reached the hotel and had had his pictures developed, he was pleased to find they had come out exceptionally well. He gave a copy of his best one, a stampeding elephant, to Freddy Elwert together with a tie-pin of two Fs intertwined with diamonds.

Arrangements were made to enable Ferdinand to entertain the Egyptian Khedive at Shepheard's. The House of Mohamet Ali was now represented by Fuad, another son of Ismail—later to become King Fuad. He was shrewd, energetic and quick-witted. He enjoyed going to parties and entertaining, and was an excellent card-player. During his visit to Ferdinand, he was received outside one of the side entrances. His limousine drove to the edge of a strip of luxurious red carpet, which had been spread for him, and in a few seconds His Royal Highness was inside the hotel without anyone on the terrace being any the wiser.

Fuad was the only member of a royal family to refuse to sign Elwert's Golden Book. When requested to do so he replied that he only autographed the first page of a new book!

Many people who stayed at Shepheard's called at Abdin Palace and signed the visitor's book in the entrance hall. One such guest was bidden to a reception and talking to one of the King's aides, whom he knew, was amused to hear of the consternation caused during the formal dinner parties when Fuad insisted on having a pretty woman sitting next to him. 'Invariably,' sighed the aide, 'the women who should be placed next to His Majesty are the ugliest! At a reception like this there is no trouble thank heavens, because of the cold buffet.' Nevertheless the same guest witnessed the strange manners of a young man who, thinking he was not observed, wrapped some succulent pieces of lobster in a handkerchief and stuffed them into the tail pocket of his evening-coat. A dignified *safragi* watched in astonishment also, and without hesitation brought a silver jug of mayonnaise and, before the young man could stop him, poured the contents into the pocket as well.

Fuad was of a jealous nature and when he fell passionately in love with a lovely Hungarian, Countess Toruk, he insisted she



should wear men's clothing whenever she went out—to avoid attention. She eventually became his second wife.

The King was particularly interested in education and was founder of Cairo university, one of the most modern seats of learning in the Middle East. While it was being built he decided he would have a royal apartment there, and sent furniture from his various palaces to furnish it. It was in the main building and every visiting King who was taken to see the university was entertained there afterwards. The suite of magnificent rooms had marble floors, silken rugs, a tinkling alabaster fountain, gilded furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl, heavily embroidered brocades, and a bathroom of black marble.

The King doted on the university and court officials were encouraged to send endowments in the form of cheques, ancient manuscripts, paintings and jewellery. Replicas of these jewels are still on permanent display in a small ante-room, together with photographs of the donors.

Several Turkish princes were habitués of Shepherd's and all who met them were captivated by their charm and bonhomie. An evening seldom went by without one of them being in the Long Bar or the Moorish Hall. They were kept in funds by the Egyptian court and lived in dilettante fashion, enjoying life. Prince Tousoun was a regular visitor. Handsome and retiring, he was courtesy itself; whenever he arrived he never failed to send a bouquet of red roses to Madame Müller, wife of the managing director. He professed to be anti-European and never forgave Fuad for his Western leanings. To have photographs taken is against the Moslem faith and the Prince, a devout Moslem, even refused to use coins with Fuad's effigy stamped on them. Then there was the gentle Prince Osman Fouad who enjoyed wine as much as Omar Khayyám but always remained mild and bland. Often at late hours in the Long Bar he would produce his beautiful Stradivarius and, smiling in his pleasant way, would play with as much verve as Rigo had in days gone by.

Not so mild was one of the Turkish princes who shall be known as 'X'. He had married a well-bred Irish beauty whose love

affairs were notorious. They lived at the hotel for some time and wherever they were there was an uproar. The Prince was madly jealous and his wife gave him good cause to be so.

The Prince discovered the identity of one of his rivals and by chance espied him coming through the swinging door from the terrace one morning. He rushed at him and brandished a gun demanding a duel there and then. The other man reached for his pistol and before anyone could rush to stop them, both fired—luckily with more rage than accuracy. One bullet lodged in the coping over the doorway, the other was never found. Both men sheepishly put away their firearms as the manager strode angrily into the hall. The bullet in the coping was left as a memento of the escapade, and Charles Müller added a touch of lipstick for better effect.

The Princess continued to play fast and loose and the Prince became more and more irate. Finally he decided he had had enough and marched off to the manager's office where he demanded that the hotel should be closed to his wife. The manager plied the Prince with champagne, of which he was inordinately fond, and commiserated with him, but pointed out that it would cause a very difficult situation.

'I am absolutely serious about this,' said the Prince.

'No doubt,' said the manager despairingly, 'but I cannot refuse the Princess entry to her own suite. I cannot forbid it.'

'You do not have to forbid it. I forbid it.'

'How?'

'She is not to pass over the threshold of Shepheard's again.'

'Have some more champagne?'

'Thank you. It is an excellent vintage.'

'Enjoy it—let us forget about the Princess.'

'I will! but not until it is made clear to her that she is not to come into this hotel again.'

'Do you expect me to keep her out forcibly?'

'Certainly.'

'My dear Prince, such a thing has not happened at Shepheard's before.'

'It is said in England there is always a first time for everything.'

'Let us look at this sensibly. I cannot lay hands on the Princess, neither can my staff.'

'Lock all the doors!'

'What about the other guests?'

'You are right, I had forgotten the other guests. You have often refused rooms to important people in the past—why not the Princess.'

'Because, my dear Prince, her belongings are here and she already lives here.'

'I will not have the Princess over the threshold of Shepherd's again, and I shall find a way to keep her out.' A determined expression swept over the Prince's handsome features.

The manager, who had also consumed a certain amount of champagne, gradually came round to the Prince's point of view. Certainly, he argued to himself, the Princess was behaving in an outrageous way. Also the Prince seemed quite adamant. He said thoughtfully.

'The Princess will want her clothes.'

'She is welcome to them.'

'Then let us pack everything she has here. If her belongings are out of the hotel by the time she returns I can keep her out of the hotel legally.'

They went to the Princess's suite. A chaise-longue was carelessly strewn with furs, jewellery sparkled on the dressing-table. The Prince opened the spacious wardrobes and cupboards; every shelf was full to overflowing, dresses hung in rows, drawers were full of gossamer lingerie. The men looked at each other helplessly. Suddenly the manager's face brightened, 'I have an idea,' he said, rubbing his hands, 'I shall send to the linen-room for some double sheets and we'll tie everything up in them. When the sheets arrived the manager unfolded one and spread it out on the carpet.

'What shall we remove first?'

'Her hats,' ejaculated the Prince, 'she won't go anywhere without a hat.'

Boxes were swept off shelves, opened, and hats were extricated from layers of tissue paper and thrown on the sheet. There was soon a high pile.

'Better tie it up before it overflows. There are any number of sheets here,' cried the Prince.

'Let us do the shoes next,' said the manager gleefully. He was entering into the affair wholeheartedly, and soon another sheet was covered with a pyramid of small, high-heeled shoes, some in soft kid, others made of brocade. These were tied up. Gradually the floor space became a mass of cumbersome white bundles.

'These will take a long time to ferry downstairs,' said the manager, 'the Princess may return before we have finished. I'll send down for some porters.'

'Why bother. If all the clothing has to be out of here before she gets back, why not throw it out of the window.'

'An excellent idea. What about her jewellery?'

'I've swept it into a hatbox and it is in one of the sheets. I'd love to see her face when she finds it! Come on, help me!'

All the bundles were thrown into the garden with gusto.

'This is the happiest day of my life,' chortled the Prince. 'I wish I had thought of it before.'

'You may feel happy, but I will have the difficult task of keeping the Princess out of the hotel,' said the manager. 'I shall have to get the door-porter to tell me the moment she comes.'

After a message had been sent to the terrace, the two men went back to their champagne in the manager's office.

When the Princess arrived she found a solicitous manager awaiting her. Soon there was a scene of lamentation at the foot of the terrace steps and the chatter from above ceased completely. Suddenly the Princess espied the bundles of her belongings being taken from the garden and stuffed into two taxis. Her tears dried miraculously. She turned on the manager and with lovely eyes blazing, screamed that she would go to Prince Y in Alexandria and to hell with Prince X. The crowd on the terrace watched with unconcealed curiosity.

'I will see that anything left behind is sent to Prince Y in

Alexandria,' said the manager politely as he pushed the Princess unceremoniously into one of the overfilled taxis. 'I'll sue you for this treatment and my husband will rue this day,' raged the Princess. 'To the station!' she commanded the taxi-driver imperiously.

As the two taxis drove off, a newcomer ascending the terrace steps said to his companion,

'What an extraordinary way to send out hotel laundry. I should never have expected it at Shepherd's.'

Prince Y received the Princess with open arms. Prince X divorced her. The day after the decree was absolute the Princess married Prince Y. The Princess could not remain faithful for long and was soon involved in more scandal. A few months after the marriage, the papers were full of a frightful episode. Prince Y had shot his lovely wife. The court case that followed was on everyone's lips for days. Prince Y was absolved. The unfortunate killing had occurred accidentally while he had been cleaning his revolver!

## II

### Souvenir Hunters

ABOUT the time that Prince Y shot his lovely wife, it fell to the lot of Sir John Aird, of Aswan fame, to announce the birth of Prince Farouk at a Shephard's luncheon. Farouk, who was to cause more furore at Shephard's than any of the Turkish princes—and not only at Shephard's.

He was Fuad's only son and was destined to become King of Egypt at the early age of eighteen. He came to the throne a fabulously rich young man and his diversions and dissipations made headlines all over the globe. Little, however, has been said about his love of wild fowl. He was a keen sportsman and a good shot. His shoot at Dahshur was one of the most magnificent in the world, where harriers flew low over the reeds and the pools were resting-places for mallard, not by the score, but literally by the hundred. Spur-winged plover, sandpipers, herons, waders, curlews, red-shanks, teal and hosts of other species constantly winged their way over idyllic expanses of water making it an ornithologist's and sportsman's paradise. Three hundred duck or more to one gun was not uncommon on a fine morning. Indeed the grapevine in the Canal Zone let it be known just when a royal shoot was to take place and several keen shots from the British garrison would station themselves beyond Dahshur and partake of the sport as birds flew over from the royal estate. Such shoots were arranged very quickly and sometimes haphazardly.

On one such occasion men had to be hurriedly collected from a near-by village as beaters. As one officer was loading his gun from a bag placed on a tree stump, he saw one of these men regarding it with such unconcealed admiration he went over to show it to him. The man stretched out his hands and, without thinking, the officer gave it to him to hold. In a flash the man was off into the

woods. After a second's surprise the officer dashed after him, furious at the way he had been misled. It was too late. The thief had vanished. The officer returned to the scene of the crime and looked angrily for his ammunition. It had vanished also!

Sportsmen complained that Farouk did not shoot his lakes at Dahshur often enough and it was popularly supposed that birds repaired by common instinct to Dahshur on Fridays, the favourite shooting day in Egypt, to the safety of the royal lakes. A wealth of wildfowl settled there during the migratory period, and the young King encouraged bird-photographers to come to his retreat so that some of the fantastic pageants of winged creatures could be captured on film.

But to return to Shepherd's. One of the great ornithologists of the day was El Lewa Sir T. W. Russell Pasha who was an authority on Egyptian birds and had written several articles on the subject and a comprehensive glossary of Arabic words and terms for sportsmen. He was head of the Cairo City Police and the Narcotics Control Service and drug-traffickers were in fear and trembling of his name.

One day Russell Pasha was discussing bird-life with Dr. Julian Huxley, one of Britain's leading zoologists, in the Moorish Hall when the latter was brought a visiting-card by a *safragi*. It was from the scion of a highly placed family from another Arab country whom, Dr. Huxley had been given to understand, was making a great deal of money out of drug smuggling. Dr. Huxley got up to greet the new arrival and then turned to present him to Russell Pasha. To onlookers it appeared as an ordinary introduction but Dr. Huxley was secretly amused to note the change of expressions as the transgressor met the law.

As Russell Pasha got older he claimed to be very hard of hearing, but his friends teased him by saying if anyone whispered, 'What will yours be?' in the Long Bar, he quickly replied, 'A double whisky!'

During the thirties Shepherd's dinner dances finished on Saturday nights on the stroke of midnight. Then there was a rush for the grill room where, for fifty piastres a head, there was supper

and further dancing. A cashier together with a reception clerk waited at the entrance and Freddy Elwert would stand near by, to see that everything was in order. There was an unwritten law, dating back to Kitchener's day, when there had been a shooting incident in the grill room, that British officers who arrived in uniform were directed to the gentlemen's cloakroom where an orderly waited to take their revolvers and hats. Civilians left their coats and scarves there also. One midnight a young man came into the grill room still in a dark overcoat and white scarf. Elwert went up to him.

'Would you kindly go to the cloakroom and remove your coat and scarf, sir,' he requested politely.

'What do you mean?' asked the man furiously.

'Have you a table booked, sir?'

'What do you mean?'

'Will you please go to the cloakroom and remove your coat. You cannot come in like that.'

'WHAT DO YOU MEAN?'

Almost before he knew what he was doing the imperturbable Freddy Elwert clipped the man under the chin and knocked him down.

A senior army officer came up as the man rose to his feet. 'Do as Mr. Elwert says,' he said quietly as he led the man through the door and glancing back over his shoulder at Elwert he smiled and said: 'You were quite right to teach him a lesson.' The supper dance got under way, but the man in the overcoat did not return. Freddy Elwert was exceedingly worried. He heard that the young man occupied a very important position in Cairo and he had visions not only of being hauled over the coals by Mr. Bachler, but of being dismissed. Nothing happened—but from that night British officers made him an honorary member of their various messes and he became affectionately known as 'Freddy of Shepherd's'. Despite this, his word was considered law and if the Long Bar became too noisy and Elwert was seen in the distance, the whisper 'Freddy is coming' immediately quietened things down.



On another occasion Freddy found himself in a difficult situation. It was impossible to stop practical jokes at Shepherd's—even the staff indulged in them—but they sometimes overstepped the bounds of propriety. Seven slightly inebriated officers were finishing their dinner in the grill room when one became annoyed and threw a large lump of ice-cream at one of his fellows. The latter ducked his head and the ice-cream landed in the corsage of the Italian Ambassador's wife who was wearing a very *décolleté* evening-frock. She jumped up with a scream, not at all amused. The incident caused great indignation and unfortunately got into the papers. Freddy Elwert was asked to call at the G.O.C.'s house and was confronted with the choice of either giving the name of the officer concerned or having Shepherd's put out of bounds. With his usual flair for diplomacy he managed to sidestep both issues but promised that should such a thing occur again he would report it at once to the Assistant Provost Marshall.

As the dining-room and grill room were invariably full at meal-times, Freddy set aside two rooms for private luncheon parties. These were greatly in demand by the shipping lines who made a luncheon at Shepherd's one of the main features of a day's sightseeing in Cairo. Pleasure cruises were *de rigueur* in the thirties and those that came to Egypt were solidly booked up from season to season. If anything went awry on a cruise it was whispered in Freddy's ear by the purser. Perhaps a passenger was dissatisfied with an inside cabin, the food on board, or some imagined slight, and Freddy would see to it that oil was poured on troubled waters by adding some extra delicacy to the meal, or by giving special attention to a particular guest.

One thing Freddy could not abide during these luncheons was smoking between courses. He felt it was an insult to the cooking, and if people did not do it at private dinner parties they should not do it at Shepherd's. As soon as a guest lit a cigarette, a *safragi* would appear, as if out of the ground, and hold a large ash-tray under the offending object—which more often than not was immediately stubbed out.

Tourists continued to be outraged if they found their travel

agents had not booked them in at Shephard's and harried the agencies to right the wrong. If this did not work the oracle, they themselves would descend on Shephard's and demand accommodation. A few would be pacified by having tea on the terrace, others found the blow softened by having Shephard's labels stuck on their luggage but the majority continued to insist on the impossible. It had been and was to remain one of the management's worst problems. Occasionally, late at night, people were allowed to sleep on the low divans in the main hall, so that they might be in the forefront the following morning when a room might become vacant. This had the added virtue that having spent the night at Shephard's, honour was satisfied for many who would agree to return to the accommodation booked by their agents.

One morning unregistered guests were found sleeping on the tables in the billiards room. After this, when the divans were full, tourists begged to sleep on the tables!

Freddy found himself in a dilemma on one such occasion when ten girls arrived from a French convent. By some oversight their accommodation had been booked for a later date. To avoid disappointing the young people, he decided to arrange one of the private dining-rooms as a dormitory for them. Unfortunately the only salon free was next to the gentlemen's lavatory—but a sign 'Out of Order' was placed over this and had the desired effect. The girls, who had been waiting in a fever of excitement to see what could be arranged, were easily placated with their cramped living-quarters and treated the whole thing as a joke. Freddy was so delighted with their attitude that he presented them with favours from a recent fancy-dress ball.

During the middle of one season, when the hotel was thoroughly overcrowded, the hotel doctor was called to see a Swiss visitor who had developed a fever. The patient also had a faint rash and it did not take the doctor many minutes to know it was a case of small-pox. It appeared the patient had been to India to see his son but had not been advised to get vaccinated before leaving Switzerland. The doctor hurriedly removed him to hospital for treatment, and after some three months the man recovered. In the meantime no

one had been any the wiser at Shepherd's and there were no ill effects.

It was with difficulty that guests were kept in ignorance when someone died at Shepherd's, for in a hot climate the deceased must be buried quickly and there was the problem of getting the body out of the hotel without anyone knowing. It was suggested at one time that an empty piano case could be made to hold a coffin for such emergencies, but this was felt to be lacking in good taste so each death had to be dealt with as it happened.

A Lady Smythe died of a sudden heart attack and her husband wished to take her body back to the family vault in England. He was overcome with grief which he did not wish to share with anyone. The hotel doctor arranged for the embalming and a coffin was smuggled into the hotel. Then there was the usual worry about getting it out again secretly, yet with dignity. Someone recalled how Cleopatra had been taken aboard Anthony's ship concealed in a carpet, so the coffin was wrapped up in a Persian rug and carried out over the terrace to a waiting car. Whether people realized what was happening or not, they had the grace to remain silent and there was no comment.

One old gentleman was found dead in his chair in the entrance hall. A car was summoned and, while the manager spoke to the silent form, two *safragis* lifted the chair out of the front entrance and down the terrace steps to the waiting vehicle without anyone realizing what had happened.

After the slow-moving funerals of their own countries, strangers are somewhat disconcerted when they watch a funeral procession in the Middle East for, despite wailing and rending of garments, the pace is a swift one.

A young Canadian guest from Shepherd's went for a drive with an Egyptian friend and was asked to wait in a car park while his host went around the corner to buy some cigarettes. The Canadian read a newspaper he happened to have in his pocket, then, annoyed at being kept waiting half an hour, left the car and walked round the corner to see what had happened. He found himself in a busy street but could not find his friend so returned to

the car park. He waited impatiently while another hour elapsed. His friend had promised to take him sightseeing and the afternoon was going by. He wondered if the missing man had met a member of his family and had had to go home. If so, surely he would have come back and told him, and certainly he would have needed the car. Perhaps he ought to telephone his friend's house. There was no telephone-box in the car park, but Shepheard's was not far away. He found an old envelope in his pocket and, scribbling a message to say he had gone back to the hotel for a few minutes, gave it to the car-park attendant with strict instructions to give it to the car owner should he return in the meantime. Having his international driving-licence in his wallet, he felt no qualms about driving the car, so slipping into gear he waved to the attendant and drove off. He drew up in front of Shepheard's and assuring the porter he would only leave the car at the entrance for a few minutes he went inside to use the telephone. He got no reply. Very worried by now, he drove back to the car park. The attendant informed him that his friend had not put in an appearance and gave him back his chit of paper. The Canadian tore it into pieces and put them in the car ash-tray. He resigned himself to waiting again and tried to snooze in the back of the car. He fell asleep. When he awoke the afternoon was nearly over. He looked round for the attendant, but the man had disappeared. By now he feared some awful accident had occurred and decided to drive the car back to his friend's house. He wondered what had happened. He stopped outside Shepheard's. Perhaps it might be a good idea to try the telephone again. This he did with no success. The hall-porter drew a little map to help him get to the street in Gezireh where his friend lived and he set off. By now the sun was setting, but the instructions were easy and before darkness fell he reached his destination. He parked the car and walked up the front steps of the house. The door was open and the hall full of weeping men and women. His friend's father came towards him, his face stricken with sorrow. 'My son is dead! My son is dead!' he cried. 'He was killed by a lorry. We have just returned from the mosque.'

While the Canadian had been waiting during the afternoon, his friend had been killed, mourned for, prepared for burial and laid to rest in the cemetery.

Almost as difficult to deal with as cases of sudden death were the guests who stormed into the manager's office crying that they had been robbed. As often as not the missing object was found, but until it was pandemonium reigned.

A gentleman was outraged because his wallet had been stolen. He was also asked if he had looked carefully in his suite before bringing his complaint. Flushing with anger he tried to control himself and protested that he could not have mislaid his own wallet. 'I always keep it in my hip pocket,' he insisted, 'someone just pinched it from behind.' The manager brightened at being told this. 'Have you looked in your private bathroom?' he asked. 'No! Why should I?' was the surprised reply. 'I think we may find it, sir. I will get the head housekeeper to assist us. Would you help too?' The man nodded his head. The searching party went upstairs. 'Let us look in your bathroom first, sir.' The trio walked into the large tiled bathroom and there on the floor near the lavatory bowl was the wallet. The manager could not resist laughing at the guest's look of astonishment. 'Do not worry, sir, all's well that ends well! Forgive me for laughing but this has often happened before. You see, when you took your trousers down to sit on the lavatory the wallet slipped out of your pocket. The last time this happened the guest concerned had gone to the gentlemen's public lavatory downstairs and we were lucky that nobody picked up his wallet before we found it.'

Guests were encouraged to leave their valuables in the hotel safe. Emory Chubb, president of the safe company bearing that name, had visited Egypt in his early years and had obtained an order from Charles Bachler for one of his largest burglar-proof safes. It was the first of its kind to be used in an hotel and not only protected jewellery and money through the vicissitudes of the life of Shepherd's but housed the Golden Books. It proved as fireproof as it was claimed to be by surviving the flames that reduced the hotel to ashes in 1952. Guests could obtain small safe boxes from

the main desk in which they locked their jewellery and personal valuables. They kept the keys and gave the boxes to the chief cashier who stacked them in the hotel safe, to which only he knew the combination.

Souvenir hunting caused Shepherd's to lose two thousand coat-hangers a year. It meant that newcomers indignantly telephoned for hangers if their wardrobes had not been refurnished since the last guest had left, yet the same people would take the new hangers and pack them with their clothes when they checked out. It finally dawned on the management this probably took place because the hotel's name was on each one and it was decided to dispense with the lettering. The annual loss immediately dropped to less than two hundred.

Ash-trays were the favourite pickings of souvenir hunters, and cost the management as much as £600 a year. The loss was written off as 'Advertising' and each season the ash-trays differed slightly in pattern and colour so that 'collectors' could gather a series over the years. Should a guest request an ash-tray as a memento from the manager's office, as a reward for his honesty, he was presented with a small package containing five, each varying slightly in design.

Filched souvenirs from Shepherd's not only went to the flesh-pots of the world but found their way to the wastes of the desert.

A British major who spent several weeks on a desert trek had occasion to visit an Omdeh in a small oasis. He arrived hungry and tired. The Omdeh bade him welcome and gave orders for a sheep to be slain for a feast. The major was invited to rest while the food was prepared. He drowsily thought of the repast before going to sleep; the sheep roasted whole on a great bed of rice, stuffed with pistachio nuts and raisins, the sweetmeats and coffee. His mouth watering with anticipation, he turned over on his side and was soon fast asleep. When he awoke he had a never-to-be-forgotten meal—but not the one he had anticipated. To begin with, it was served in European style, with silver and a strange set of dinner china which bore, not only Shepherd's crest, but the crests of the Bibby and P. & O. Lines. Course followed course,

each more delicious than the last. Knowing his host had been to Cairo several times, he thought the Omdeh had probably bought his unusual dinner-service in the Mousky—where everything finds its way sooner or later—and he made no comment; but he could not resist asking about the cook who produced such succulent food. 'Ah,' exclaimed the Omdeh in delight, 'I am so glad you are enjoying my food. Allah is good! My eldest son is visiting me from Cairo. He used to be one of the assistant chefs at Shepherd's Hotel.'

The line drawn between souvenir hunting and theft is a delicate one. A man was seen in the writing-room at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem quite openly taking a solid silver writing-set together with its silver tray. He had gone to his bedroom and closed the door before any of the dumbfounded onlookers could say anything. He was leaving the hotel in an hour and was going to Egypt where he was booked in at Shepherd's. Freddy Elwert received a cable asking him to try to get the pilfered articles back.

After greeting the newcomer Freddy informed him gravely that the King David Hotel had been in touch with him and it was feared there had been a stupid mistake. When the guest opened his luggage he would find some of the King David writing-room silver. To save the man any embarrassment Freddy added:

'One of the hotel servants must have packed the silver in your baggage by mistake. If you would kindly return it to me I shall see that it is sent back to Jerusalem.'

'I have never heard such rubbish in my life,' blustered the man. 'I know you are mistaken, but I shall see if what you say is true.' He was shown to his room.

The following morning he went to see Freddy.

'You were quite wrong, Mr. Elwert. There is no silver in my luggage. I told you it was nonsense.'

'Nevertheless I feel certain you will find the silver. Have you unpacked everything?'

'Of course I have. And there is no silver,' came the indignant reply.

'I am afraid the matter cannot rest there, sir. Your embassy will have to be informed.'

'I believe there may be one small bag that I have not searched. It is just possible the silver might be in it. I shall go and see.'

'I would be most grateful if you would look, sir,' said Freddy.

A few minutes later the silver was returned.

When something of particular value disappeared at Shephard's and a particular guest was known to have taken it, he was politely asked to return the missing object, it being carefully pointed out it was quite understood the thing had only been 'collected' as a souvenir. If this did not have the desired effect the only alternative was to ask the guest when he was about to leave that if he should discover anything from Shephard's when he got home, packed in some corner inadvertently, would he be kind enough to return it. If this brought no response the affair was forgotten, but the gentleman in question was blacklisted and accommodation refused him in the future.

Freddy Elwert found that during his ten years at Shephard's, all those working in the hotel were scrupulously honest. He locked nothing, and nothing was touched. Only once did he have an outbreak of thieving and even then it was nothing to do with the staff. When the police were called in they tracked down a small gang of French jewel thieves at work.

When no crises affected the smooth running of the hotel, the staff turned their attention to playing practical jokes among themselves—and woe betide the man getting married. One would-be groom, fearing the ragging of his fellows, did not say he was going to spend his honeymoon in Aswan and kept the name of the hotel in Cairo secret where he and his bride were to spend their first night of nuptial bliss.

The bridal couple got to their hotel as dusk was falling. They were shown to their room which was large and well furnished. The main light was high in the ceiling and around the room were little side-lamps which a *safragi* switched on.

About midnight the light in the centre of the ceiling went on, so blindingly bright it could only have been caused by a 1,000-watt bulb. The groom got out of bed and switched it off. It was switched on again from the corridor. The groom went out to the



hall but could see no one. Each time he turned the light off it came on again so that in the end he had to leave it. It went out just before dawn and he and his wife fell asleep. At seven o'clock they were rudely awakened by a special choir singing outside their door. They packed as quickly as they could and, without waiting for breakfast, took a taxi to the station. There they were met by a band of musicians, each playing a different tune. Pushing their way through porters and amused spectators they hurried into their reserved *wagon-lit*. The walls had been plastered with nude girls.

The train journey was uneventful and when they arrived at Aswan the ragging seemed to be over. There was no band to meet them and the bridal couple relaxed. Through the mass of people, which always gathers on Egyptian platforms, a small boy appeared carrying a thin strip of red carpet. This he spread with great ceremony before the bride but just as she was about to step on it, he drew it away. Everyone laughed, including the groom, as this procedure continued along the platform. Small wonder members of Shepherd's staff preferred to marry when they were on holiday in Europe.

Mr. B., an American representative for a leading firm of tyre manufacturers in the Middle East, made his headquarters at Shepherd's for some ten years. Finding himself in Teheran and partaking of some delicious Caspian caviare, he thought of his friends in the Long Bar, and feeling certain they would enjoy this delicacy, he had a consignment shipped to Shepherd's. When he was next staying at the hotel he found a fantastically large bill waiting for him. He went to Freddy Elwert's office and asked how on earth his bill could be so much when he had not even been staying in the hotel.

'Do you remember sending the Caspian caviare to the chaps in the Long Bar?' asked Freddy.

'I certainly do. I hope they enjoyed it.'

'They were delighted with it, but you didn't expect me to serve such caviare without the best champagne did you?'

Mr. B. could not refrain from laughing at Freddy's twinkling expression. He paid the bill.

'Freddy of Shephard's' was the perfect hotelier. He came from a long line of hotel proprietors, was born in an hotel and has lived in hotels ever since. As soon as he left school he started his apprenticeship in the kitchen of his father's hotel, the Central in Zürich—which he owns and runs today—and after some three years went to London. After a year at the Carlton he became reception clerk at the Berkeley, then assistant manager. In 1923 he went to the Savoy as assistant manager for three years. He was a great swimmer and sun-worshipper and when he was offered the same post at Shephard's in Cairo he accepted with avidity. He loved Shephard's and only left when his father died in Switzerland and bequeathed to him and his brother the family hotel.

A Mr. J., representative for a large Scotch whisky firm in the Middle East said of Freddy at Shephard's:

'He was an amazing "party" man. I once watched him run four parties at the same time. He was giving a cocktail party in his own flat at the hotel, and without anyone noticing his absence, he appeared in the Long Bar where another cocktail party was in session; he deftly saw to the needs of people in a private dining-room where a banquet was being held and then greeted distinguished guests in the Moorish Hall at a reception. At the four parties he seemed to be at each person's elbow, asking if they would like a drink or had met so-and-so. The really interesting thing,' Mr. J. concluded, 'is that the more people Freddy has to entertain—the more he thrives.'

One of Shephard's constant visitors was far too fond of alcohol and Freddy, who was a keen photographer, managed to take a candid snapshot of him after he had imbibed too steadily at the Long Bar. He waited until one of the local newspapers came out with a photograph of a convict, then persuaded the printer to make one special copy for him substituting his snap for the proper one. The caption beneath read 'In prison'. This was delivered with breakfast to the offender. The point must have gone home because, after this the gentleman's consumption of alcohol dropped considerably.

Not so amusing was the case of the smell in the managing

director's office. A member of the staff had stuck a piece of very ripe cheese under the desk and the smell was appalling and not only filled the office with a noisome odour, but the corridor leading to it as well. The managing director felt it must be caused by a decaying rat somewhere and ordered his furniture shifted about in his office while the carpet was rolled back and the wainscoting investigated. Finally the floor-boards were pulled up but no rat was found. By this time the practical joker thought things had gone far enough and, when no one was looking, managed to remove the offending piece of cheese.

Not everyone knew that Freddy enjoyed practical jokes as much as any member of his staff—nor the number in which he himself took part—but one did not come off entirely as planned.

A certain Mr. Fisher, who was not on the best of terms with Freddy Elwert, was a great connoisseur of wine and brought a party to dine at Shepherd's. He had ordered, by telephone, a special menu with delectable wines. He took great care in seating his guests and the dinner-party began. The wine-waiter came up to the table. Mr. Fisher had never seen him before and thought it was a pity he wore such a long beard and moustache because it completely covered the lower part of his face. However, he wore a spotless galabia and gloves and, bowing deferentially, proceeded to uncork the first bottle of wine. He passed a little in a wineglass to the host to try. It must have been very flat, to judge by the expression on Mr. Fisher's face, and he ordered that the bottle be taken away and replaced by another of the same vintage. This was done and the wine was delicious. As the fish was being served the wine-waiter uncorked the next bottle and proffered a little to Mr. Fisher. He drew back hurriedly as Mr. Fisher's face contorted in a horrible grimace. Mr. Fisher's guests regarded him with dismay.

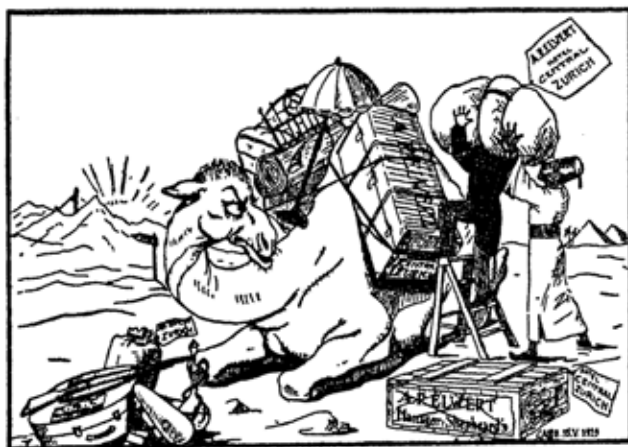
'Are you ill?' asked the lady on his right.

'No!' choked her host. 'Bring me another bottle of wine right away and throw this out,' he ordered the wine-waiter giving him back the wineglass. 'I am afraid the heat of Egypt must have turned those bottles of wine,' Mr. Fisher explained to his guests, although I have never known it happen before. It is certainly odd

that two bottles should be bad and handed to me on the same night. Ah well, such a thing could not occur again.'

The waiter had returned with a new bottle. This time Mr. Fisher examined the bottle carefully before gesturing the wine-waiter to open it. The waiter seemed to have great difficulty in drawing the cork and turned his back to pull hard. Then with a look of satisfaction offered a little wine to Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher looked at the colour suspiciously, smelt the liquid, then sipped a little. His face donned an expression of excruciating pain, tears fell down his cheeks and he glared at the wine-waiter. The latter drew back quickly, making an unfortunate remark in Arabic, which Mr. Fisher understood. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Mr. Fisher sprang at the man and hit him in the face. The waiter vanished and Mr. Fisher strode angrily out of the room in search of Mr. Elwert! He was told Mr. Elwert was away for the evening. However the assistant manager appeared on the scene and when he heard what had happened was very upset. He was extremely sorry and said the waiter would be most sternly reprimanded. Slightly mollified, Mr. Fisher returned to his guests and the dinner proceeded without further incident.

The following day Freddy arrived at his office with a black eye.



Cartoon of Freddy Elwert leaving Shephard's to go to Hotel Central

## I2

### Gala Occasions

A SPECIAL gala entitled 'Faerie Cingalaise', held on the 17th March 1928, turned out to be one of the epic balls at Shepherd's. It was also a great night for Charles Bachler, who was celebrating his success of the afternoon at Gezirch when one of his racehorses had won the Allenby Cup. The large silver goblet had pride of place on his table, its handles tied with ribbons in his racing-colours. Among the distinguished guests were His Royal Highness the Maharaja of Mysore, His Royal Highness the Maharaja Kumar of Kapurthala and Ahmed Fey Aboud—later to become Aboud Pasha, a great industrialist, shipping owner and, at the time, one of the seven richest men in the world. People who hoped to come on to the ball after private dinner-parties and had been unwise enough not to book tables had to be turned away.

The main restaurant was completely disguised for the evening. Guests walked into a tropical forest. Palm-trees, their fronds reaching up and spreading over the ceiling, lined the walls against a background of trailing vines and evergreens. Demon masks, lit up from behind, were carved in the trees. Lifelike models of animals, high-lighted in green behind transparent veils of gauze, crept stealthily through artificial undergrowth. All the jungle beasts were there, lions, tigers, gazelles, baboons, Mowgli with his wolf—even a bear padded through the tangled vegetation as if it was his natural habitat. Brightly coloured birds with magnificent plumage perched among the trees, and an ape swung down from a branch as if about to spring among the guests.

Two native huts flanked the central archway leading to the ballroom which had been turned into the interior of an Indian temple. The windows were draped in pale pink brocade and illuminated from behind, so that statues of Kali, the many-armed

goddess, were shown in silhouette against them. Glowing lights shone through her mouth and eyes. Snakes swarmed round the walls. The enormous Ismail chandelier, hanging from the centre of the ceiling, had been converted into a huge temple-bell. Other realistic snakes slithered among the table-lamps.

The illusion of a night in the tropics was complete when the favours were distributed; there were fantastic head-dresses for the ladies, gaily coloured turbans for the men, little tom-toms fringed with strips of paper and complete with drum-sticks, snake bracelets of silver, small marmosets with bushy tails which could be jerked up and down on sticks, and fans of gay feathers shaped like tropical butterflies.

An even larger ball was held a few weeks later, not as exotic, but none the less crowded and again people had to be turned away. Guests were transported back to their childhood. Fairy-tale tableaux, against a cream background, were placed along one side of the ballroom. Trails of bougainvillea twined round the tops of pillars and hung down from the ceiling, where an enormous silver ball encased the Ismail chandelier. It revolved slowly, spraying rays of light over the room. Guests peered out of the windows where, floodlighted on the lawn, stood Cinderella's coach, Puss-in-Boots and Red Riding Hood. The favours were also fairy-like: brightly coloured trumpets, small scent-bottles shaped like red-capped dwarfs, Red Riding Hood vanity cases, tiny boxes of jade and silver, and French dolls dressed as princesses.

Among the guests were Prince Stolberg Wernigerode, Prince Stolberg Fossila, Comtesse de Salverte, Count Nostitz and the officers and their ladies of the 15/17 Hussars.

The year 1928 was outstanding for balls at Shepherds' the most enterprising one having a Swiss flavour. Paintings by the Russian artist Eugène Kassessinoff depicting Swiss scenes, were displayed amidst trellis-work of vines hung with bunches of grapes. Around the restaurant stood tubs of small fruit-trees in full flower and doves of varying sizes.

The archway between the two rooms was transformed into a doorway which led into a Swiss room hung with old portraits and

a huge cuckoo clock. The log walls were complete with small windows, and through the starched muslin curtains pots of scarlet geraniums could be seen standing on the ledges outside. These were superimposed over a brightly lit landscape of a Swiss village.

During the dancing, ladies were presented with wide straw hats, wreathed with ribbons of cornflowers, poppies and buttercups. Towards the end of the evening the band suddenly stopped playing and, as people stood about uncertainly, Swiss music and yodelling rang through the room. The management had laid on this surprise by having a special programme from Zürich relayed via London to Cairo by the Standard Telephone and Cables Company.

The decorations for this ball were so successful that they were kept for the following Christmas Eve, when the right note was added by sprinkling artificial snow over the summer scenes and hanging glittering icicles at the entrance to the chalet.

By midnight on Christmas Eve over one thousand people crowded into the lounge and restaurant. More space had been made by incorporating the veranda into the grill room with the aid of tented walls lined with Persian rugs. Tables were heaped high with red roses and crackers, and there were gifts for everyone; minute Christmas trees in white pots, feathered parasols and other gay trifles.

The New Year's Eve Ball was always the main party of the year at Shepherd's and it was traditional for everyone to gather in the Moorish Hall before midnight, when the lights went out. When they were turned on again they lit up a dramatic tableau which had been kept a closely guarded secret.

In 1928, above the archway at the far end of the Moorish Hall; a large sphere representing the world, hung suspended between painted scenery depicting blue sky and white clouds. As usual, when midnight struck the lights went out. Gradually the globe of the world lit up and slowly opened in half. Flights of white doves flew overhead and a pretty girl, dressed in shimmering silver *lamé*, stepped out. A cannon was by her side and from it she fired rose petals and flowers on the guests below. Balloons floated down

from the ceiling and everyone joined together singing 'Auld Lang Syne'! After the New Year's greetings there was a frantic rush for tables.

The grill room was decorated as 'A Night at the Trianon'. Outside the windows on the lawn life-sized figures could be seen in picturesque crinoline skirts, satin trousers, powdered wigs and the dainty apparel of Marie-Antoinette's time, feeding titbits to a gaily coloured peacock. Inside, a massive fan completely covered one wall. Gilt-framed medallions with small winged cupids hung here and there. Over the serving-door a peacock, with outspread tail, stood preening himself. Wreaths of evergreens were suspended from the ceiling, massed with red ribbons and flying cupids. Gifts included ash-trays, powder-bowls, cigarette-cases and Parisian dolls in crinolines of silk and satin.

Costume dances amassed so much money it was decided to give charity balls in the same vein. One of the first was called 'Fête des Corsaires' and had a 'pirate theme'; another was 'Sous Les Ailes' which caused much amusement. In the latter the ballroom represented Heaven and was designed in blue and white, floating clouds hung from the ceiling while cherubs cavorted around the chandelier. Fleeing clouds along the walls supported elderly gentlemen in long robes, with beatific expressions on their faces and multicoloured wings sprouting from their shoulders. One old man used his cloud as an automobile and another used his as a bed in which he was blissfully asleep. Standard-lamps had been transformed into Victorian lamp-posts and the dance band wore golden bowler hats.

The second room represented Hades. Gigantic red flames hung from the ceiling and the walls were draped in scarlet and black. Lights shone through horrifying masks and devils lurked behind black cardboard rocks.

The first dance of the winter season was invariably given at Shepherd's on a Saturday night. After that, lists of private dances would be published. It was a matter of honour with dance bands at the hotel that they should be the first in Cairo to play the latest dance tunes. As one member remarked, 'A last season's



dance tune is like a last season's flirtation—better forgotten! Cabarets were extremely good. It was amazing how Shepherd's kept such a high standard in service, wines and food when it was always so crowded. It could have coasted on its reputation for months at a time but, again it was a matter of honour with each member of the staff that Shepherd's world-wide renown for service must be upheld.

By chance the two excellent housekeepers were artists with floral arrangements. One was responsible for the top two floors and the other for the rest of the hotel. They heartily disliked each other—for no particular reason—which augured a high standard for the establishment as each strove to do things better than the other. One of these ladies worked at the hotel for forty years.

During the season there was little, if any, rest for members of the staff. For weeks at a time they were so busy that they went no farther afield than the hotel's garden. But the interesting guests, the generous tipping, the practical joking that went on among themselves and a healthy respect for those in charge, kept the hotel running on smooth wheels. Also the weather was perfect, neither too hot nor too cold—unlike the summer months when even the liveliest person felt lackadaisical.

The tourist never ceased to be amazed by the delightful winter climate but as the sun shone every day, for once, the weather ceased to be a topic of conversation. Yet custom dies hard and habit caused everyone to glance through the weather forecast, which was faithfully produced by the *Egyptian Gazette* each day and made the most unusual reading. One chosen at random states:

Forecast for the 24 hours ending noon today. N.W. winds, fresh at times on coast. Further rain on the coast, accompanied by thunder at times. Further showers in Lower and Middle Egypt. Remaining cool. Rainfall during the 24 hours ending noon yesterday: Mersa Matruh 21 mms. Alexandria 7 mms. Damietta 0.10 mms. Port Said 0.2 mms. Cairo DROPS.

Only very occasionally were there showers of rain; some winters there were none, but a shower, however short, brought miraculous results. Dormant plants came to life and sap rose in the trees. Even the desert bloomed. Camel scrub blossomed and a light green film swept over the wadies. Tiny, brightly coloured flowers sprang out of the sand. The delta gardens were enchanting. Dusty palm-fronds were rejuvenated. Rosebuds could be watched opening in Shephard's garden and their enticing scent filled the air. Scarcely had the rain begun to fall when it ceased and the sun reappeared in a washed blue sky, yet during its absence the rain had magically caused the dry barren earth to throb with life.

With the coming of summer the weather forecasts stopped in the *Egyptian Gazette* until the following season. The last one was in June and read:

Since weather in Egypt becomes settled during the summer season, forecasts will not be issued during the summer unless exceptional weather is expected. Forecasts will be resumed in September next.

In 1929 when one of Thomas Cook's representatives in Egypt, Mr. Todd, was returning to his post after a holiday in England it was suggested that he should start an International Rotary Group in Cairo. He was given some explanatory pamphlets which elucidated the Rotary ideal of service to the community—but what appealed to Mr. Todd most was the word 'International'. If a club could be formed, considerable emphasis could be placed on this side of Rotary activity in heterogeneous Cairo, and he decided to seek the opinion of leading citizens as to whether such a group was feasible.

In the beginning the idea did not stimulate much interest. There were clubs galore in Cairo and many of them supported international projects.

Mr. Todd was talking about the subject one morning in his office with a visitor from England who was an avid Rotarian, Sir Samuel Gluckstein—director of the famous firm of Lyons. Listening to the two men discussing the pros and cons was the

head of the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce, who suddenly said:

'I think it is a good scheme. Look at the three of us here, an Englishman, an Irishman and a Jew—we're an international trio as it is!'

'Let's go over to Shepherd's and discuss it with Charles Baehler,' said Mr. Todd. 'If he likes the idea he will join us and he's another nationality, a Swiss.'

The three men walked out of Cook's, up the terrace steps, through the Moorish Hall and knocked at Charles Baehler's office door. He was in and greeted them affably. He became imbued with their enthusiasm and agreed to help promote the new club. 'That is,' he said with a twinkle in his eye, 'if you will have your Rotary lunches at Shepherd's.'

The others laughingly agreed.

'Well, then,' said Charles Baehler, 'let us go into the Long Bar and have a drink to clinch the deal.'

While sipping his cocktail Mr. Todd espied a friend of his from Assiut and went over to chat with him.

'Zaki! Do you know anything about Rotary?' he asked.

'A little—why?'

'Well! We have decided to start an international club here. Would you join us if we do?'

'I should be delighted to do so—but there is one condition.'

'What is that?'

'That you have your weekly luncheon on Wednesday, as that is the only day during the week when I am sure to be in Cairo.'

'Right! Wednesday it shall be. During the last half hour we have an Irishman, a Swiss and an Englishman as prospective members—you are our first Egyptian.'

Dr. Risner, an American who was a cigarette manufacturer in Egypt, came into the bar and agreed to join as well. Each man promised to come to lunch at Shepherd's the following Wednesday and to bring a friend of another nationality. Thus the nucleus of the International Rotary Group in Egypt was formed in Shepherd's Long Bar.

The plan gathered impetus and by the third Wednesday, twenty-one men wished to become members. Together with their guests that particular day, they represented twenty-seven different countries—a record for an International Rotary luncheon.

News of the new group spread quickly in the Rotarian world and telegrams poured into Shephard's congratulating the fledgling—one of them being a three-page telegram from Chicago. The President of Dutch Rotary agreed to come to Egypt for the inauguration and a date was soon fixed.

Sir Samuel Gluckstein sent a bell and gavel from England to be presented at the opening ceremony and Mr. Todd began making plans for the occasion. He lived in his own houseboat on the Nile and had given many successful parties on board. He wondered if the new paddle-steamer, the *S.S. Sudan*, would make an unusual setting for the inauguration. She had been chartered by Thomas Cook's to take tourists to Upper Egypt but was not to make her maiden voyage for some weeks. The new Egyptian Rotarians decided it was a good idea and invitations were sent out for a special luncheon party.

Mr. Todd's own houseboat was moored alongside the luxurious one belonging to King Fuad and, as by custom in the Middle East kings and their households have an approachability unknown elsewhere, there was no dividing line on the river-bank between the royal garden and its neighbour. When Mr. and Mrs. Todd gave a party the royal gardeners insisted on lending great pots of plants and flowers, and they took as much interest in the forthcoming party as did Mr. Todd's own staff.

The *S.S. Sudan* was moored some distance down the river and, so that she might be more easily reached from the centre of the city, it was decided to bring her through the Nile suspension bridges close by the resident houseboats.

A special menu was arranged for the luncheon and menu-cards were designed with painted Pharaonic symbols. Twenty-five countries were represented by the forty new Rotarians and their wives who came to the gala occasion. After a delicious luncheon, coffee was served and the speeches began. The first was given by

the general manager of Shell Oil, Mr. Martin, who had been elected chairman, and ended when the Dutch president presented the new charter.

Each Rotarian thanked the Dutch president in his own language. The most interesting observation came from Judge Crabites, a member of the Egyptian Court of Appeal. He said, 'I am already a microcosm of International Rotary for I am American by birth, French by extraction, Roman by religion, and I serve an Egyptian King.'

Mr. Todd wrote to Sir Samuel Gluckstein to tell him that his bell and gavel were now in use. Sir Samuel received the letter four days before his death. In replying to Mr. Todd later, Lady Gluckstein told how the news had been delightedly received by her husband who had remarked that it had given him a sense of accomplishment and comfort.

The Wednesday luncheons continued year after year at Shepherd's, and hospitals, schools and other institutions benefited from the various Rotarian projects. When Rotary International celebrated its fiftieth birthday all over the world in 1955, the Egyptians issued a special stamp to mark the event.

Several other members of the Thomas Cook organization in Egypt did public work and one of Cairo's leading philanthropists was the general manager, Mr. Harrison. Among other things he was chairman of the Church Council for several years and a plaque commemorating his work was to be installed in the church.

When the plaque was finished it was sent to the office of a friend so that Harrison might see it before the presentation. The citation enumerated his good works and ended with the words:

He was a staunch supporter of this place.

Mr. Harrison read it through carefully and then began to smile. 'It should not be placed in the church,' he said.

'Where would you put it?' asked his friend.

'I think it would be more appropriate to hang it in Shepherd's Long Bar!'

'Many a true word spoken in jest,' laughed his friend, for Harrison, who was a bachelor, went to the Long Bar each evening for a drink before dinner. People who wished to see him about church matters—or anything else—always knew they could find him there. It was the same with other Cairo personalities. If anyone was needed urgently and was not to be found in his own flat, as often as not he could be reached at Shephard's. Cairo residents believed the hotel was entirely theirs. The *Egyptian Gazette* reiterated this with complacency at the beginning of the 1930 season.

Shephard's gave their first dance of the season on Saturday night. In spite of the fact that most people had been up very late the night before at the Gunner's Ball and that the Gloucester's and the Welsh Guards were engaged in boxing or in watching boxing, a great many people came in to dance at Shephard's. Most people have a tender spot in their hearts for Shephard's which Cairo residents consider belongs to them entirely. It is used as a 'Half-Way House' by innumerable officers and without its dances the season would not be a season at all. On Saturday, only the first room was being used, which enabled all the windows in the room to be kept open and this kept the ballroom at a satisfactory temperature throughout the evening.

The room was decorated with pink roses arranged in alcoves with soft electric lights behind them. The large room looked secluded and intimate. The beginning of the season is appreciated more than later on, when both rooms have to be used. The music is just loud enough—later both rooms are open and the band has to play louder.

Both the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Gloucester were to honour Shephard's with their presence in 1930. The Prince gave proof of his boundless energy during his first Saturday in Cairo. During the morning he reviewed the First Battalion of Welsh Guards at Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, the First Battalion of the South Wales Borderers at the Citadel, the Twelfth Lancers at Helmieh

and, still before lunch, visited the R.A.F. at Heliopolis. During the afternoon he played polo and squash rackets at Gezireh and in the evening he gave a dinner party at Shepherd's. Still undaunted, the Prince then took his party on to dance at the Gezireh Sporting Club. Reporters faithfully recorded the various functions the Prince attended but they had a field day when he insisted on taking a pot shot at a golf ball on the top of the Great Pyramid and descriptions of this filled many columns.

The newspapers duly reported special functions at Shepherd's and there were many photographs showing life at the hotel, those relating to banquets were collected by the chief chef, Monsieur Martin. His one passion other than food was horse racing, on which he squandered much of his money. When he read his daily newspaper, he would study the racing results with great concentration before turning the pages to glance at the pictures to see if any were suitable for his collection. One was of two *safragis* standing behind a wall of wine-bottles that reached up beyond their waists and was entitled 'The Morning after the Night before'. Another showed a live 250-kilo turtle which had been ordered from Bombay for a Christmas dinner. The festive season was also the subject of a picture showing a page-boy 'driving' a large turkey—one of 150 to be cooked for Christmas Day. Yet another photograph was of an Imperial Airways liner arriving at Cairo Airport on a special flight from Galilee to deliver grapefruit and Jaffa oranges for Shepherd's.

Monsieur Martin presided over his kitchens like a king, and woe betide anyone who dared talk to him while he was blending one of his exotic sauces for these were treated with reverential devotion. Rich delicious smells assailed the nostrils of all who came to see his spotless kitchens. There was always a great scurrying and chattering among the cooks, but if the 'Chef de Brigade' was mixing a very special dish, he had but to raise an expressive eyebrow and there was complete quiet and a score of servants were ready to do his bidding.

Cairo residents claimed that to spend Christmas Day at Shepherd's must be done at least once—then it became a habit.

Children were not forgotten and there was a party held for them in the Moorish Hall during the afternoon after which toys were taken down from a large Christmas tree and handed out. Menus printed for the day bore pictures of Santa Claus with sacks of presents over his shoulder.

The hotel bands changed from time to time. Joe Rainer's Hill Billies had a great vogue, as did the Lotus Band. The latter had their bandstands decorated with the same lotus motif as the hotel sign—three fully opened lotus flowers superimposed over the words 'Quis Aquam Nili Bibit Aerum Bibet!' The Inseparables were a most unusual trio—each a well-known dance-band leader. The drummer, Jack Wallace, had been a conductor at the Miramer Hotel in Biarritz, Lou Preager had directed the band at the Kursaal at Ostend and Maurice Harford, the saxophonist and guitarist, had had his own band at the Piccadilly Hotel in London. The three men had met in Paris while on holiday pooled their talent and offered their services to Shepheard's.

In 1931 the ballroom was fitted with concealed lighting. This leant a note of glamour and banished the remaining Victorian atmosphere. Guests found it far more pleasant for *tête-à-tête* and enjoyed watching the colourful kaleidoscopic patterns made by the swirling dancers in the half-light.

Dancing was such a favourite pastime that informal dances were started on Tuesday evenings in the 'Isis' room, the music being played by a 'Melody Deo', Peter and Bert.

South American music was becoming the rage, but the band was too ahead of itself with the rhumba which was so new that when it was played for the first time, before tourists who had just arrived from America, Britain and Germany, only one couple ventured on the floor. Not many couples can claim to have danced alone in the ballroom, yet a few weeks later the same thing occurred again, only this time there were two couples—and the hotel had prepared for four hundred.

A certain Mr. J. D. McCarthy made a suggestion that the 17th March, St. Patrick's Day, would be a perfect date to have an all-Irish ball. Mr. McCarthy doubted that the ballroom was big



enough to cope with all the Irishmen living in Cairo, who, he assured the management, would flock to the hotel, therefore he thought it better to dispense with the booking arrangements. This sounded so convincing that anyone who inquired for a table was told firmly that the ball was to be exclusively Irish. Saint Patrick's night arrived. All day decorating had been going on in the ballroom and accommodation had been arranged for some four hundred guests. Leading from the stairs to the dance floor stood a double row of large emerald-green clover leaves made of cardboard. The band had been busily practising Irish tunes and reels. When Mr. McCarthy arrived at ten o'clock with his party of four, Mr. F. C. Brown (Scotch), Miss Nancy Hughes (Welsh) and Miss Ashley (English) they found themselves strictly alone. Mr. McCarthy did not understand it; he himself had been telephoned by the management and told that waiters were ready to serve dinner but that the ballroom was quite empty! The foursome dined well and danced until midnight—by themselves. It was the first party of its kind to be held on such a lavish scale, and certainly Mr. McCarthy's guests enjoyed it. It can only be presumed that many an Irishman celebrated too early and too long that night to remember the ball at Shepherd's.

Mr. McCarthy did not feel very cheerful the following week. Everyone in Cairo was laughing and his leg was pulled unmercifully. No one ever discovered, and the management did not betray, what he had had to pay Shepherd's for the disastrous Saint Patrick's Night Ball.

To give Mr. McCarthy his due, he rose above the occasion and went to see Freddy Elwert, who, as always, was ready to take part in a joke. He receipted a fake bill made out for one hundred guests, and when anyone teased Mr. McCarthy about his dance, he would pull this bill out of his wallet and show it with a wry smile, whereupon the jester usually whistled sympathetically and hurried away.

The last dance of the 1931 season went under the name of 'Venetian Fête'. Japanese lanterns and the flags of all nations decorated the garden. Couples danced out on the open-air dance

floor and dined beneath the trees. During the intervals classical music was played by the regimental band of the 17/21st Lancers while people strolled in the garden. The menu contained among other things 'Gondolettes de sole des Doges'. Among the guests were the two young Princes of Hyderabad, the Belgian Minister and two well-known Americans Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius.

Since the days of Samuel Shephard the hotel had arranged hundreds of desert picnics for its guests, but in 1932 one of the Thomas Cook cruises wanted a desert party with a difference—so it was decided to have a musical one with dancing. It was for one of the *Franconia's* cruises and the passengers thoroughly enjoyed it. Taxis drove them, together with quantities of fruit, sandwiches, cakes and wine, far beyond the Pyramids to a desolate, sandy waste; behind them trailed a large truck with waiters, the Lotus band and their instruments. Nothing was left to chance and pots of flowers to decorate the desert were not forgotten. The dancing was spirited—if short in duration, and it was decided to give similar parties in the future.

On her maiden voyage the *Aquitania* decanted many of her distinguished passengers at Alexandria for a sightseeing tour. When they arrived at Shephard's there was a press interview and without exception each visitor remarked, as so many had before them, that should the most modern hotel in the world be opened in Cairo, travellers would still go to Shephard's—for no other reason than that it was Shephard's.

In 1932 several cuttings were sent to the manager from various parts of the world extolling the hotel. One appeared in the *Buenos Aires Herald* after Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Dreyfors had returned from a world cruise.

Mrs. Dreyfors, wife of Mr. Alvin C. Dreyfors manager of the International Freighting Corporation in this city said that of all the countries they had visited she liked Egypt and Palestine best of all, and that Shephard's Hotel in Cairo was the outstanding place for exceeding her expectations.

Famous people sometimes put on an impromptu cabaret show

at the hotel for the benefit of the other diners and dancers. In one of the social columns during the same season appeared the news that:

Next Saturday Dame Sybil Thorndyke, Sir Lewis Casson and the whole of their company will be dining and dancing in the Grill, and it is rumoured that an attempt will be made to induce Dame Sybil to give one of her famous recitations.

The first ball of the 1933 season was given at Shepherd's by the 12th Lancers. Some 500 people were invited, the guest of honour being ex-King Alfonso of Spain, who was a field marshal in the British Army. Guests entered through a line of troopers in full dress uniform. In the ballroom the red and gold chairs exactly matched the regimental colours. Vases of red and yellow flowers decorated the tables and the regimental silver was on display in the smaller ballroom. The menu read:

Oxtail Soup  
Mousseuse de Volaille Seigné  
Langoustes de Méditerranée à la Thermidor  
Sole Meunière  
Poularde de Bresse au Porto  
Bonquet de Primeurs  
Tournedos Rossini  
Salade de Saison  
Garbe d'Asperges Mousse d'Or  
Poires Belle-Hélène  
Friandises  
Gorbeille de Pomone

Monsieur Martin designed shrimps in aspic in the form of the regimental badge. The regimental band played in the garden during the dining. Dancing went on throughout the night until breakfast was served at 5.30 a.m. A gay time had been enjoyed by everyone, including ex-King Alfonso, who had not missed a dance.

Redecorating took place at the hotel each year as soon as the

last guest had departed at the end of the season. An electric grill was installed in the grill room during 1934 and the far end of the room turned into a winter garden. Easy chairs and tables were set down between banks of flowers, and it became fashionable to sit there and have cocktails before dinner.

The French architect, Jean Riboult, was commissioned to change the ballroom from its Louis XVI period to Pharaonic style. It was an inspiring task and his imaginative designs were ably carried out by Perswal and Wahid Gargour, decorative panels were hand-carved by a professor at the Cairo School of Fine Arts and when finished, the recreated ballroom had an aura of oriental splendour. The fine, wide staircase leading down to it was covered in thick crimson carpet which matched the leather upholstery of the chairs. The balustrade of gilt and silver metal was twisted into Pharaonic emblems. Twenty-four hollow alabaster pillars lined the room and were illuminated from inside. Their translucent sides were of the faintest, palest pink, their capitals, like those in ancient temples, were in the form of lotus flowers and scrolled with silver and gold. Engraved mirrors covered the doors, over them bas reliefs showed Pharaonic figures fishing, hunting and gathering flowers. Frescoes above the windows were of dancing scenes. Ventilation was provided by circular openings in the cupola. Concealed lighting in the vaulting and the tops of the pillars shed a rosy glow over the ceiling. The bandshell was placed midway down the ballroom so that the music could flow throughout the room rather than at one end, and it was flanked on either side by service doors.

News of the exotic *décor* was soon spread abroad and the following New Year's Eve police had to be put on duty outside the hotel to prevent would-be guests rushing the doors. Even so, long queues of cars waited hopefully and patiently, the occupants convinced in their own minds that if they waited long enough they would be admitted. Inside the hotel, dancers waited expectantly in the Moorish Hall for the midnight show. Two trumpeters of the 8th Hussars sounded the Last Post just before it began.

As the first stroke of midnight reverberated over the waiting

crowd, great curtains were drawn aside to reveal a gargantuan white-jacketed barman holding a gigantic cocktail shaker in dazzling light. At each chime of the clock one vast hand threw an emblem of the dying year into the shaker, his face moving to one side to watch what he was doing, as he threw in the various ingredients. After the twelfth stroke he remained still. The trumpeters played a fanfare and as they did so, the barman turned the shaker as if to pour out a drink. The shaker split down the middle and out stepped a scantily dressed girl who flung largesse from a basket on her arm at the merry-makers.

Each year the sets for these spectacles were set up overnight and the tireless staff dismantled them within twenty-four hours so as not to interfere with the normal running of the hotel.

The chimes that ushered in the New Year from 1937 onward sounded like those of Big Ben. Cairo University had been presented with a new one-hundred-and-ten-feet-high clock-tower and a vast clock and chimes had been sent from England. When it had been assembled British guests seated on the terrace could not believe their ears when they heard Westminster chimes. The hours were struck on a five-and-a-half-ton Bourdon bell and four smaller bells sounded the Westminster quarters. On windy days Westminster chimes can still be heard ringing out across Cairo to the Pyramids.

During the same season the veteran Maharaja of Baroda made his first long-distance flight from India for a holiday in Egypt. He was received with great warmth. His story was a true, fantastic 'Rags to Riches' one. He had been born some seventy years before in a small peasant village, an unwanted child of no background, and existed for many years ragged, untaught and hungry. By chance he was noticed by the widow of a Maharaja who was fascinated by the waif's charm and quick intelligence. She adopted him. The years went by and eventually, as in an Eastern fairy tale, through the deposition of the holder of the throne for misrule, he was made Maharaja. His foster mother's belief in him was fully justified; he remembered his own unhappy childhood and throughout his reign patiently tried to improve the living

conditions of his people, and was one of the first Indian leaders to wage war against caste restrictions, enforced widowhood and poverty.

His Highness stayed at Shepherd's Hotel during his Cairo visit and had several long conversations with Charles Baehler who, among other stories, told him about Kléber's tree and how the General had actually been assassinated on what was now the site of the managing director's office. The old tale seemed to catch everyone's imagination and another interested listener, who arrived close on the Maharaja's heels, was Guiseppe Motta, President of the Swiss confederation. Monsieur Motta had been a member of the Swiss Government for some twenty-five years and this was his fourth time as President. His visit to Shepherd's, like the Maharaja's was an entirely unofficial one.

Some months before, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks had come for a holiday. They enjoyed it so much that they told all their friends and soon other film stars could be glimpsed on the terrace; directors and producers followed in their trail. The latter discovered that Egypt was not only a country for pleasure but with its predictable light and weather was an excellent place to go on location.

Gaumont British sent a company to Cairo and Shepherd's guests were interested when they found out that some of the scenes were to be taken on the terrace. Jack Hulbert was the star. It proved fun both for the cast and the onlookers. The extras, who included many of Cairo's prettiest girls, sipped drinks at the small tables on the terrace and contrived to look glamorous while the cameras turned—and were paid one hundred piastres each to do so. Jack Hulbert portrayed a dragoman and in one rehearsal caused laughter when he outwitted a bona fide dragoman by enticing two new arrivals, a lady and her daughter, from the real one who had been soliciting their patronage. Among the amused spectators was Robert Hichens.

Another story of mistaken identity was going the rounds of the terrace tables.

The Ministry of Agriculture received a cable signed by the

Secretary of the Department of Agriculture from London. It stated briefly that Lord Derby would arrive at Port Said and requested that he be met. Wondering why such a cable should be addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture, officials referred the matter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who were also mystified. The boat was arriving within a few hours and it was decided, as Lord Derby owned a large estate in England, probably he was coming to Egypt to study agricultural questions, which might well be the reason the Minister of Agriculture had the cable addressed to him. A deputation duly waited Lord Derby's arrival at Port Said and a special launch put out to his ship to attend to his Lordship's luggage. A delegate scrambled on deck and asked to be conducted to Lord Derby. He was taken below and brought face to face with a magnificent bull!

It was soon discovered that the beast had been sent to Egypt from Lord Derby's estate for breeding purposes at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, which had not connected the short cryptic wire with the order it had sent a short time before.

Such stories were quickly forgotten as public interest was focused on the season's great event—the marriage of King Farouk to Farida. Cairo was *en fête*, triumphal arches spanned the roads, the station was a mass of flags and bunting, mosque minarets were illuminated each night by thousands of electric bulbs and people held carnival in the streets. On the day of the wedding Bedouin horsemen gave a magnificent horse-dancing display in Shepherd's garden and at night a gigantic crown of coloured lights sparkled over the entrance to the terrace.

The thirties were slowly coming to a close and, as if to make up for the war years ahead, Nature added an unusual bewitchment to New Year's Day. People awoke to find snow lay thick in Opera Square, the banks of the Nile were edged with ice and frost glistened on the maidenhair ferns and potted palms on Shepherd's terrace.

## 13

### The Second World War

WHEN the Second World War began, Shephard's management anxiously debated whether the hotel should close down for the duration. The matter was decided, not by the management, but by the turn of events that brought about the fighting in North Africa when, as in the First World War, hundreds of officers swarmed into the hotel. As nearly thirty years before, farewells ended with the phrase: 'See you at Shephard's.' Brother officers off to fight in the desert with different units said: 'If we lose touch, leave a message at Shephard's.' Lovers making trysts for the future whispered: 'Let's make it at Shepheards.'

Once again the hotel became 'home' to many an officer. One colonel had his kit carried to his bedroom by the same *safragi* who had taken his luggage up twenty years before, when he had arrived at Shephard's as a subaltern during the Gallipoli campaign. Sons found that the dusky bronze maidens holding their torches aloft were not figments of their fathers' imagination, and the Persian carpets, stained-glass windows and granite pillars with their painted capitals seemed vaguely familiar. Had their fathers returned they would have been amazed at the lack of change. Small tables for dining in the garden were still covered with spotless white linen and heaped with flowers; time had not altered the sleek velvet of the Egyptian sky, the golden mellowness of the moon, nor the softness of the air. The tempo of the music was different, but the sheltering palms threw the same purple shadows on the green grass. Bougainvillea continued to cascade down over the wooden trellis-work and sweet-scented flowers were vivid as ever in the moonlight.

Beneath Kléber's tree conversation turned from travelling and big business, to war plans and espionage, only lover's phrases did



not change. The Australians came back, the French and the Allies.

The Long Bar was crowded as never before. One brigadier had to pinch himself to see if he was dreaming. He found he had sat down on a stool next to the same well-known Cairene he had sat next to when last in the Long Bar many years before. When he had caught his breath he asked jokingly if the gentleman had just come in, or had he not moved for the past few years.

The kite's cry still sounded overhead by day and at night inebriated soldiery raced the old *gharry* horses about the Cairo streets as their fathers had before them. The clock had turned back. Difficult to believe the Italian army was dangerously near the borders of Egypt—as the Mahdi forces had been so long ago. So close were the Italians that the Duce ordered his white stallion to be sent to North Africa, so that he could ride in triumph through the streets of Cairo at the head of his army—no doubt with dreams of riding past Shepherd's terrace as had Kitchener on his white thoroughbred donkey.

When the Italian danger was over it was succeeded by the dread of German invasion. Guns were set up in the Ezbekieh Gardens and went into action spasmodically at night, when a few bombs fell on Cairo. No appreciable damage was done and it seemed as nothing to officers on leave after the strafing in the desert. Yet the threat was very real and Rommel's forces almost came within sight of the Citadel minarets. Before the Battle of El Alamein, it was rumoured that the famous German general had sent a wireless message to Cairo to book a suite at Shepherd's. The myth was further enhanced when a handsome young New Zealand officer strode purposefully up to one of the porters on the steps of the terrace and in a loud and mocking voice asked: 'Has General Rommel arrived?' The porter looked terrified and suggested the clerk at the reception desk should be asked.

The officer went in to the reception desk and asked again: 'Has General Rommel arrived?' The reception clerk looked shocked. 'I will see, sir,' he said, and began to turn the pages of his book nervously. The young officer regarded him sternly for some five minutes as he turned page after page. Finally the clerk looked up.

'No, sir, he has not arrived.'

'He will come soon,' said the officer and strode out of the hotel, while those on the terrace looked visibly shaken.

Another rumour said Rommel had already stayed at Shephard's and had contacted his fifth column in Cairo. The story went that he came disguised as a British officer, asked for accommodation under an assumed name and had been told he would have to share a room with another British officer. This he agreed to do. He left the following day—but not before sending his visiting-card to one of the British generals.

Rommel stories continued to ebb and flow before Alamein but the one that gained most credence was that he had booked a suite at Shephard's. If so, it was under an assumed name. Certainly if Rommel had reached Cairo it would have been natural for him to wish to reside on the spot where Napoleon had stayed before him, but as ill-fortune had plagued Napoleon so the Desert Rats brought disaster to Rommel.

After the fierce, unending fighting in the desert, Cairo seemed like a dream for those on leave—a dream from which no one wished to wake.

In *The Sun Stood Still*,<sup>1</sup> J. C. Mustarde, a medical officer, writes:

After weeks, or more probably months, of sand and blazing sunshine, Cairo spells paradise to the average healthy soldier; and can any man who has experienced it ever forget that delicious moment when, dust covered and thoroughly tired of all deserts and wars in general, he steps from the taxi in front of Shephard's Hotel and slowly mounts the stair towards the fleshpots of Egypt? How superb it is, while lifting one heavy booted foot after another up the broad steps, to contemplate with self-tantalizing deliberation the good things of life now almost within one's grasp—the soothing comfort of a clean warm bath, the sartorial freshness of a snappy, carefully laundered leave outfit, and the quiet soul-restoring joy of lolling at ease in the shade drinking 'Horses' Necks' to one's

<sup>1</sup> Pilot Press, London, n.d.

heart's content. One rolls the thought of these things round in one's mouth, as if it were a large sugar bullseye, hoping wistfully to make the feeling last almost indefinitely.

Cairo was certainly gay. Parties were legion; there was racing, tennis, polo, shooting, swimming and sailing. Rationing did not exist. Young women preened themselves for they had never had such a choice of suitors before. Cairo was a female's mecca and for each girl there were over a hundred men on leave—all with money in their pockets. War was close, international affairs had gone awry, but for those on leave it was eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow might bring death on the battlefield.

The Mousky could hardly keep abreast of the demand for merchandise as officers and men thronged its narrow alleyways, searching for gifts to send home to mothers and sweethearts.

Austerity, if it can be called such, consisted at Shepherd's of a new ruling about drinks. No one could be served with cocktails or sherry until after midday, when *safragis* would appear with small dishes of peanuts for the terrace tables, the members of a small orchestra would arrange themselves behind the palms and people would gather for their pre-luncheon drinks. No further orders could be accepted after 2.30 p.m. The bars were opened again at 6.30 until 10 o'clock at night. As these new decrees followed the licensing laws of Britain, everyone soon became accustomed to them.

On the surface, life was as merry as it had ever been at Shepherd's. Fashions worn by women guests at receptions and balls were duly reported in the press the following day. Yet in sharp contrast to the lovely evening-frocks and smart uniforms, figures in worn, drab battledress would appear in the Moorish Hall on certain nights of the week, when Air Transport Command sent buses to collect those returning to the desert. The men would be driven to one of the aerodromes on the outskirts of the capital, and, under cover of darkness, would be flown out to the fighting areas.

One of the pleasurable pastimes servicemen most looked forward to was a visit from ENSA.

ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) was formed in England during the first weeks of the war by such scions of the theatre as Basil Dean, Sir Seymour Hicks and Jack Buchanan. Auditions were held on the historic stage of London's Drury Lane to choose artists and make up concert parties to entertain servicemen wherever they might be. Sir Seymour warned the would-be participants that the work would mean 'roughing it', but this did not dampen the ardour of the many artists who wished to give their services.

One of the original concert parties was 'Hello Happiness' the first non-star show to be sent to France in 1939. The troops gave the cast an enthusiastic welcome wherever they went. Even when the Germans broke through the battlefield the company continued playing, giving shows in garages, farm-houses, or in the open air, often within sound of enemy guns.

Early in 1940 the same 'Hello Happiness' cast went to Egypt. Their first concert was in Alexandria which took place to the then unusual accompaniment of an air-raid overhead. The Royal Opera House had been booked for them in Cairo, and for the first and only time the stage echoed with the staccato sounds of tap-dancing, music-hall jokes, burlesque and swing; but the thunderous applause from the auditorium as the curtain went down was the same as ever. Elsie Winsor, the leading soprano, had a most pleasing voice, reminiscent of Josie Collin's in the First World War. King Farouk was in the royal box on the first night and she was presented to him at the end of the performance. The manager of the Opera House, Soliman Naguib, sent a beautiful Persian silk shawl to her dressing-room with a card pinned to it reading:

I will be pleased if you accept this present, which I hope will always remind you of Egypt, Cairo, the Opera House and lastly an admirer of your talent, spirit and charm.

The success of 'Hello Happiness' was to continue for the next four years throughout the Middle East. The company stuck with the Eighth Army all the way to Tunis and travelled to Palestine,

Iraq, Cyprus and Iran. A month was spent in Malta giving shows all round the island in small cinemas.

The company had many hair-breadth escapes. They played in tents and hangars to audiences of servicemen varying from ten to a thousand. Often they gave four shows a day, travelling many miles between each performance. At one outpost a sandstorm blew up and tore their tent away and they could scarcely see the audience through the swirling sand. A short time later they had a motor-coach smash in which several of the troupe suffered minor injuries.

In all, Elsie Winsor never missed a performance in one thousand consecutive concerts—which represented an aggregate audience of 2,000,000 troops. She was awarded the French, Italian, and African Stars and was the only ENSA artist to put up such a record. In recognition of this ENSA booked her a room at Shepherd's for several months in 1943. Once again the hotel served as a respite from the rigours of the desert.

Elsie Winsor's comfortable room was a far cry from the conditions in which she had lived since she had left England. At last she had room to begin sorting her innumerable press cuttings, photographs and souvenirs. War or no war, Shepherd's was never lacking in romantic or eccentric figures and she found it interesting to watch other people on the terrace instead of being on the stage herself.

As the war progressed the bronzed faces of officers who sat on the terrace became lined and thinner; small, brightly coloured ribbons appeared on khaki breasts. *Safragis* with anxious faces helped officers with missing limbs to sit at the little tables, but there was always a cheerful atmosphere and fleeting glimpses were caught of King Peter of Yugoslavia, Montgomery, Auchinleck, Alexander, King George of the Hellenes; lovely Delysia, clad in *soignée* evening-frocks, on her way to entertain in some desert camp, Orde Wingate, Aly Khan in British uniform, chic Josephine Baker who took part in troops' concerts but steadfastly refused to appear in any stage shows for civilians; Cecil Beaton and Noël Coward. King Farouk dined at the hotel frequently and always

demanding red roses as a centrepiece. Exotic ladies came and went like modern Mata Haris, but most of them just wanted a good time. Men were far more dangerous. One handsome gentleman, distinguished and wearing a well-known old school tie, entertained officers so lavishly in the grill room that it was brought to the notice of the authorities. Investigation proved that he was a German spy who had been parachuted into the desert with an unlimited supply of money to glean what information he could at Shepherd's.

People imagine that a manager knows exactly what takes place in his hotel, but this is not always so, nor does it pay him to know everything—especially in war-time.

A stranger came into Shepherd's one morning and demanded to see the manager. A *safragi* took him to the office, knocked on the door and showed him in. The manager regarded the man questioningly and the stranger passed a document across the office desk and without saying a word left the room. The manager looked at the document. The contents did not mean anything to him but appeared to be military information of some kind. He hurriedly rushed into the Moorish Hall to waylay the stranger but he had vanished into thin air. The manager looked at the document in a puzzled manner. It might be a hoax—on the other hand it might be valuable information. He put it in his pocket. Perhaps the stranger would return. Nothing happened. After a day or so the manager passed the document over to British Intelligence. He asked no questions.

Despite the manager's amicable outlook, he of course noticed certain things not observed by the visitor and thereby averted many a crisis—but he was not always fortunate. He knew that one Air Force lieutenant drank every evening in the Long Bar with a highly suspicious character and felt it was his duty to warn him that the man he was consorting with was an obvious informer. He decided to call on the lieutenant in his bedroom. As he went upstairs one of the *safragis* came running down with a terrified expression on his face. 'Sir,' he gasped, 'I have just been to Lieutenant Stewart's room to turn his bed down for the night. He

has slashed his wrists and is in a pool of blood on the carpet. The manager rushed up the remaining stairs to the room. It was too late. The lieutenant was dead. The suicide was kept out of the papers and again the manager made no comment and asked no questions.

Any manager can spot the 'non-payer', a breed which exists in war-time as well as in peace. The hotel bills of several officers were paid by their regiments to avoid scandal. One particular captain was outrageously extravagant and the manager took it upon himself to warn his colonel that bills were mounting up which the captain seemed to have no hope of paying. The colonel waved the matter aside. Later when he was approached about the debt once more he was astonished when he perused the figures and apologized for being terse on the former occasion. Again the regiment paid up.

The hotel *safragis* were discretion itself and never at a loss as to how to deal with a situation. Nothing surprised them.

An elderly guest impatiently rang his bell in his room and, when a breathless *safragi* arrived, berated him for taking so long to come.

'I went into the bathroom to take a bath and what do you think I found?' he asked angrily.

'I do not know, sir.'

'I found a damn' great crocodile in the bathtub!'

The *safragi* knew from experience that any gentleman who smelt strongly of whisky, as this guest did, might encounter any number of wild beasts.

'It is not a normal occurrence at Shepherd's, sir! I am afraid the crocodile must have come up through the drain. I will go and chase it away immediately.'

*Safragis* also had their own code of ethics.

One officer and his girl friend were caught *flagranti delicto* in the garden by a *safragi* who appeared out of nowhere.

'You can't make love here, sir,' he said politely.

'Why not?' said the officer blushing furiously as he got to his feet.

'Because you are not a resident of this hotel, sir,' was the calm reply, as the *safragi* sedately turned on his heel and walked away.

Despite the constant change-over of officers the hotel still retained many whimsical *habitués*. There was a strange couple who never left their room until midnight. Then they would come down into the main hall, eat a small supper, and stay there for most of the night, just watching what went on. Another midnight figure was a wealthy Pasha, who lived in a large palace not more than a mile away. He would usually be found snoozing in the bar at closing time, and the barman would lead him solicitously away to an armchair in the hall. There he would sleep quite happily, until in the early morning a chauffeur would come with a large car to drive him home.

One of the old residents kept an amusing collection of newspaper pictures with wrong captions, easily explained as many men who worked the printing machines in Cairo could not read English. One was a front-page picture of a dinner-party the caption below reading, 'Taking place at Westminster Abbey today'. Another was of King Farouk with two friends at a dinner-party, printed beneath was, 'Contented these gharry horses munch their dinner on the shady side'.

The barman in the Long Bar was now Joe Scialon. He was called the 'most popular man in the Middle East' by the Allied officers for he knew exactly what each nationality wanted: Scotch and water for the British, Bourbon and rye for the Americans and gin and limejuice for those from the Commonwealth. Joe's eyes were understanding and crinkled at the corners when he smiled. He had fine white teeth and his chestnut wavy hair was parted in the centre and brushed straight back from a broad forehead. He wore an immaculately tailored white coat and white bow-tie. Everyone knew Joe, but nobody knew anything about him. When asked about his background or family he cheerfully lied to everybody. To one he answered, 'I was born of a Russian mother and a Venetian father on the high seas'; to another, 'I am a Jew from Zagazig'. There was no doubt that he had travelled the world for



he had worked in New York, London, Paris, Khartoum, Algiers, Istanbul and Rome. He spoke English, Italian, French, German, Russian, Greek and Arabic. He invented a drink that became famous with the Allied forces, called 'Suffering Bastard'. So well-known did it become that there was a special 'Hangover Chart' appertaining to it, which hung in the Long Bar and was called 'Plotting the Bender'. Joe was invariably asked for the names of the ingredients, and once again cheerfully told different things to different people. To one imbibor who asked how he invented it he said, 'I stuck some gin and Bourbon into the shaker and looked around for something to take the curse off it. I threw in some lime cordial, angostura, added ginger-ale for fizz, shook it up with ice and topped it with mint.'

Joe presided over some strange drinking-sessions during the war and his proud boast, like Gasperini's claim never to have been owed money, was that no one ever came to blows. One drinking-bout between a Turk and a Canadian was never to be forgotten. The Turk was carried out and the Canadian passed out.

Joe's able assistant had been trained by Gasperini and had helped serve at the Long Bar for thirty-one years. He was a rotund, cheerful *safragi* named Hassein Ahmed Awadallah, and needed little persuasion to tell stories about the various kings for whom he had mixed drinks.

The Long Bar had always been exclusively male but during the Second World War ladies were allowed in, which many felt to be as sacrilegious as allowing women into a men's club. Joe managed, in his inimitable way, to stroke down ruffled feathers and those he could not win over by coercion he presented with a double S.B. (as the 'Suffering Bastards' were called in order not to offend the ears of the ladies) the fire of which killed all objections.

One day a high-ranking officer of the Royal Palace's special police force called on the manager:

'His Majesty is most concerned about an article he has read in a magazine about Shepherd's Long Bar.'

'Really?' said the manager wondering what on earth was coming next.

## Shepherd's Cairo

## HANGOVER CHART

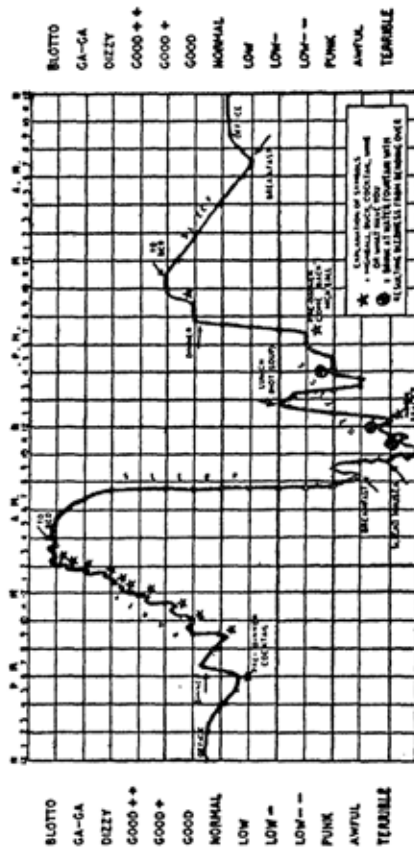
## PLOTTING THE BENDER

BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF A VAST NUMBER OF SUBJECTS THE CHART BELOW IS THE RESULT OF A THOROUGH ANALYSIS OF MANY HANDOVERS AND ITS GRAPH REPRESENTS THE AVERAGE OF THIS SOMEWHAT PREVALENT MALADY. A CAREFUL STUDY WILL REVEAL THE NORMAL (ALTHOUGH NOT EXACTLY IDEAL) TENDS OF THE SUBJECT'S PHYSICAL CONDITION FOR TWO HECTIC WEEK-DAYS, TO BE CHOSEN AT WILL. CHART DOES NOT COVER WEEK-ENDS, WHICH PRESENT A MORE PROBLEM IN FLUCTUATION.)

TO USE THE CHART CORRECTLY, FIRST FOLLOW DIRECTIONS CLOSELY BEGINNING WITH 12 N. "NORMAL," AND ENDING WITH 1 A.M., "BLOTTO," FROM HERE THE HANG-

CUMSTANCES EAT CARAMELS; AND (3) THE HIGHBALL AT 7 P.M., "LOW —", SHOULD BE A WHEL.

WHEN THE HANDOVER COINCIDES WITH THE CHART, THE CHART SHOULD BE REFERRED TO BEFORE GOING ON A PARTY SO THAT ENERGIES AND CONTINGENCIES MAY BE ANTICIPATED SUCH AS (1) ADVANCEANCE OF BRAWLS, (2) RUNNING OUT OF LIQUOR, (3) WHEN TO DO THE LEAST AMOUNT OF WORK AT THE OFFICE AND (4) DETERMINING WHETHER THE PHYSICAL CONDITION WILL BE "MUNGE" OR JUST "LOW". WHEN THE CLIENT CALLS TO SIGN THE CONTRACT.



'This article mentions a special cocktail made in this hotel called an "S.B." These letters are used in a very cutting manner—in fact with a hint of disparagement. The article suggests that S.B. means something rather unsavoury—not the actual drink but the letters S.B. His Majesty is very upset.'

'Oh!' ejaculated the manager in dismay.

'His Majesty wishes to know what the letters S.B. stand for.'

'Well,' said the manager thinking quickly, 'S.B. stands for "Suffering Bar-Steward" because the poor man had to work very hard indeed to invent it. It is difficult to get suitable mixtures for cocktails in war-time and our barman concocted this very excellent one after much experimentation. That is why it is called Suffering Bar-Steward.'

The explanation was accepted and the manager gravely bowed the high-ranking officer out of his office.

Many newspaper correspondents stayed at Shepherd's and foregathered at the Long Bar at cocktail time. After a farewell dinner party for one of their number one evening the men decided to go out and stir up the town. When they returned for a final drink in the room of the departing member, he found that one of his brother journalists had managed to get into his room earlier in the day, and left scrawled lipstick messages of adieu from supposed mistresses, all highly improper in tone, over his dressing-table mirror. This had only been possible because there seemed to be an unwritten law among certain newspaper men that their bedroom doors at Shepherd's should remain unlocked at all times.

To each correspondent 'Cairo Life' meant something different. To Eve Curie a typical day was summed up as 'a luncheon at the British Embassy with Sir Miles Lampson, a tea with the Free French and a dinner at Shepherd's Hotel'.<sup>1</sup>

Censors for the three services had offices so far apart that a newspaper man wasted a considerable amount of time getting the necessary permission to hand on his dispatches. Alan Moorhead and other war-time correspondents thought it would be interesting to set up a 'Censorship Derby'. Each man would mount a

<sup>1</sup> *Journey Among Warriors*, Heinemann, London, 1943.

horse-drawn gharry outside Shepherd's and set off to get his article stamped by the three censors. Since the censors were often playing golf or at a party, it was reckoned that four hours would have been fast time to complete the course, the winning-post of which was to be the cable office.

Correspondents came into their own when famous war lords met in the capital; Roosevelt, Churchill, Generalissimo Chiang and General Smuts. The latter stayed as usual at Shepherd's. Shepherd's was something like coming home to General Smuts and to many of the *safragis* he was like a benign father. He avoided publicity of all kinds and never used the main entrance. The manager arranged one of the luggage lifts for him with beautifully hung Arab tapestries. It was also used when the King and Queen of Greece came to visit him in his private sitting-room.

When General de Gaulle arrived to encourage the Free French Movement in North Africa he stayed at the hotel and a banquet was given for him to meet the Chiefs of Staff. He was as reserved as General Smuts and the staff caught only glimpses of him when he was coming in or going out. When he signed the Golden Book the manager kept the blotter he used which was beautifully marked with his signature in reverse. It was later taken from the manager's desk by a souvenir hunter.

The war correspondents played poker together frequently and during one all-night session before going back to the war zone, Quentin Reynolds the American writer, won \$2,000.

While fighting in the desert many officers thought of the old hotel with nostalgia—especially when things were going wrong. It seemed impossible to Philip Guedalla watching the collapsing front of Cyrenaica that in 'that imperturbable metropolis' Cairo at the same moment 'taxi were still setting down their cheerful fares along the crowded terrace of Shepherd's Hotel'.

When the desert fighting went badly the favourite criticism from overseas was that the war was fought from Shepherd's terrace, and armchair grumblers pointed out that the hotel could still produce Khartoum duck and imported grouse and it was a 'poor show'. Men in the First World War had been called the same

derogatory names, but now a new title was added. The 'Long Range Desert Group' was called the 'Short Range Shepherd's Group' with malice—or good nature—depending on how the speaker felt. When the Africa Star was awarded to those who fought in the Middle East, a poem went the rounds of Cairo night-clubs which began

We never went West of Gezireh  
We never went North of the Nile  
We never went past the Pyramids  
Out of sight of the Sphinx's smile.  
We fought the war in Shepherd's  
And the Continental Bar  
We reserved our punch for the Turf Club  
lunch  
And they gave us the Africa Star.

Whether the men referred to enjoyed their life in Egypt's capital or not, they had plenty to do. Plans were continually made and cancelled—in case the Italians got too close—in case the Germans broke through—in case Cairo was bombed—in case Cairo was to be evacuated. At one time hours were spent in hurriedly burning all confidential papers, but after Alamein the nervous tension eased.

As the war went on, more and more American accents mingled with the clipped speech of the British on Shepherd's terrace. The Americans could not believe they could rent a room at the famous Shepherd's for as little as \$2 a day, IF they could get a room. They were amused at the various 'do's and dont's' of the staff, that the page-boys must never carry luggage, that the Nubian porters always carried too much, how the same porters had to sit on wooden benches to one side of the terrace steps while the dragomen had chairs. A notice in the foyer warned them against hiring guides not recommended by the hotel.

### IMPORTANT TO VISITORS

Visitors are warned against engaging  
GUIDES DRAGOMEN in the street.

THE HALL PORTER has a list of guides authorised to act as such at Shepherd's and will supply them on demand.

THE MANAGER.

The Americans soon joined in the 'binges' and joking at the hotel. Dean Acheson's son, a judge advocate general, suffered a slight mishap when artillery fire from the desert shook the old hotel so that a picture fell off the wall onto his head and caused a slight injury. A practical joker put his name in for the American battle-wound medal—the Purple Heart.

The hotel was a hive of activity twenty-four hours a day during the war, and there was no respite during the summer months. Yet there was a certain freshness and beauty when the sun rose each morning that caused tiredness to drop away from the weariest of the night staff and make those that took over their duties sing at their work; the housekeepers bustled around in newly starched smocks, the cooks hummed in the kitchens, the lift-boys whistled and for a brief hour or so all seemed well with the world.

Everything that was bought or scrounged that could not be carried in a kit-bag was 'left at Shepherd's for the duration'. The vast low-ceilinged basement was more than ever before like a treasure house in the subterranean vault of a Pharaonic tomb. It was piled high to the very ceiling with trunks, suitcases, duffel-bags, skis, paper parcels, swords, cameras, heads of 'big game', bicycles, golf-clubs, tennis-rackets and much else besides.

The 'Message Board' bulged with unclaimed letters, cables and notes, many of them for men who would never return from the desert. Familiar faces vanished as time went by but more came to take their place.

One night army officers returning from the desert on leave found there was not a single bed remaining for them—not even divans in the hall. Their disappointment was such and their arguments as to the importance of staying the night so convincing, that the manager had his argument swept aside and capitulated.

lated. He said they might set up their own camp-beds in the entrance hall when everyone else had gone to bed, but told them they must expect no service and be up before breakfast.

Early risers coming down the wide staircase next morning were amazed to see tousled young men in narrow beds, being handed mugs of tea by smart batmen in khaki, which each quietly sipped, propped up on one elbow. The gaudy pyjama coats displayed, dazzled the eyes of the onlookers to such an extent that one gentleman turned into the bar instead of going to the grill room for his early breakfast.

The most widely quoted story that grew up during the war about Shepherd's was of a British major who was court-martialled for running through the corridors completely unclothed, chasing a young female guest. He was finally exonerated when his defence quoted an Army regulation to the effect that an officer may wear any costume appropriate to the sport in which he is engaged at the moment!

No account of Shepherd's during the last war would be complete without reference to the two weeks when the kitchens were closed by order of 'Authority' on the grounds of alleged lack of cleanliness.

In March 1944 the following appeared in many newspapers:

**SHEPHEARD'S OUT OF BOUNDS  
FOR FORTNIGHT  
FROM TOMORROW**

The order prohibits all officers of the United Nations Forces from using the hotel with the exception of those actually resident on that date because of what Allied Authorities term 'the insanitary conditions of the hotel kitchens'.

The hotel was only closed to outside visitors. The people who were living there continued to eat their meals without suffering any dire effects!

## 14

### Peace

WITH the departure of Allied officers after the war Shepheard's settled down to its former peace-time existence. Europeans found it pleasant to journey abroad once more. Newcomers who came to Shepheard's from war-torn capitals could scarcely believe that a clap of the hands brought willing service with a smile; that laundry was returned, beautifully ironed, the very day it had been sent away and any arrangements required for sightseeing could be left in the capable hands of the management. There seemed to be no great hurry or fuss, yet things were done as smoothly and quickly as a trick of legerdemain.

The staff, after the hurry and bustle of the last five years, also found it a pleasure to do their work in the old gracious manner. Even table-cloth laying went back to being a practised art. A damask cloth would be held in such a way that it landed with a neat puff of air in its correct position, and the *safragi* could step back for a brief second and admire its perfect symmetry, before placing a cut-glass vase of roses in the exact centre. Fine Irish linen replaced worn sheets, the refrigeration system was brought up to date, new crested china was ordered from Switzerland. Once again wines could be selected in France each year by that connoisseur Charles Müller. Orders were given to the Mousky for more hand-wrought silver. One of the large bedrooms was given over to carpet-making, and a master rug-weaver with a company of youths repaired the damage done during the war. The new loom reached to the ceiling and work was begun on a thousand-foot-long rug for the corridor connecting with the terrace.

The refurbished chairs and new brocaded cushions made the famous bronze ladies with their lamps look rather jaded. It was impossible to banish them altogether but they were sent from the



entrance hall and went from floor to floor to less conspicuous positions. They still made their presence felt however, and many visitors asked about their fate and came to do them homage.

When there was an exodus of the British Army to the Canal Zone the familiar lean faces of officers and men vanished from the streets of Cairo but Shepherd's still attracted, and at weekends cars drew up before the entrance, and there was the well-known rush up the terrace steps by officers to book rooms before playing golf or polo at the Gezireh Sporting Club.

Conversation on the terrace had gone back to international chit-chat, an orchestra played quietly in the hall during the afternoons and Cairo residents joined the visitors in time for tea or cocktails. At the foot of the terrace steps the vendors added plastic novelties to their other wares.

Newcomers smiled at what appeared to be a chain system in tipping. One porter would carry luggage from the lobby to the elevator, another would shoulder the load from the lift to the assigned floor, where a third man waited to take the baggage to the correct room. Smiles turned to exclamations of delight when those who had not stayed at the hotel before were shown into the palatial suites with their bronze beds, inlaid mahogany furniture, crystal chandeliers and French brocaded sofas and chairs; in the high-ceilinged bathrooms the younger generation threw unbelieving glances at the porcelain lavatory bowls with their multi-coloured floral designs.

As in the past many eccentric people came to stay. One lady, who thought of nothing but clothes, could not make her mind up as to what would be suitable to put on to go to the pyramids. She did not find it difficult to decide what to wear for a walk, or what to wear for riding—or indeed what to don to go out in the blazing sunshine, the trouble was to know what would be smart to wear for all three together. It seemed an insurmountable problem but she was longing to see the pyramids and after a week's cogitation compromised by wearing a pair of three-quarter-length yachting-trousers—in red and yellow cotton—as suitable to ride a camel, a Mexican wide-brimmed hat to guard her complexion

against the sun and very high cork-platform shoes for walking over the sand. The latter had taken the longest to choose as the lady considered it imperative to keep her feet well above the ground because of lizards and snakes, at the same time she knew high heels were unsuitable over sand—the high cork-soles she considered a brainwave. However, she had not reckoned with visiting the tomb in the Great Pyramid. As she hesitated outside the Great Pyramid, the dragoman came to see if anything was wrong. 'Oh, Ismail,' she said in dismay, 'I'm not sure that yachting-trousers are quite the thing to wear in a tomb.'

'Do not worry, madam,' said Ismail soothingly, 'the Pharaoh will not notice—he is dead.'

Another lady visiting the pyramids would not leave the site until she had seen two sphinxes. She was assured there was only THE sphinx but remained unconvinced.

The pyramids and sphinx were always number one on any visitor's list of sightseeing and the Cairo Museum of Antiquities came a close second. In the war years it had been considered prudent to close the museum, and during this period the custodians had been able to do certain rearranging. A special room was set aside for the splendid, heavy, gold ornaments and vases from the ancient site of Tanis—the result of ten years' patient work by Monsieur Monet, Professor at the Collège de France.

The treasures of the Middle XVIIIth Dynasty were now gathered in a separate gallery of their own. This was the period of El-Amarna, memorable for the elongated statues of Akhenaton and the lovely 'Green Head' of Queen Nefertiti. The latter is still in Germany, although Egyptologists hope it will be returned to its rightful place in Egypt one day. It had a narrow escape during the war when all such museum pieces were stored underground for safety. The 'Green Head' was wrapped in glass-paper and hidden in a salt-mine. Perhaps the few people who knew of its whereabouts were killed; at any rate the world-famous bust was forgotten. Miraculously, and by pure chance, it was discovered in the salt-mine by an American soldier, who recognized it and handed it over to the authorities. It was sent to the Wiesbaden Museum—

the only museum in the whole of Germany not to be damaged in some way during the war—where it has remained for some years. It is in a room by itself; soft diffused light plays on the glass case in which it is placed, from a skylight high above, and the surrounding walls are hung with grey linen draperies. Those who enter the Queen's sanctum do so quietly and remain silent before her perfect beauty.

A less-known head of Nefertiti is in the Cairo Museum. Its height is some thirteen inches and it has the well-known perfect cast of features but, being of brown quartzite, has not the delicacy or purity of line of the 'Green Head'.

Perhaps, after the magnificence of the Tutankhamen Gallery, the exquisite alabaster statue of Ameneritus seems the most beautiful exhibit to visitors, and it was now placed in a corner by itself in the new gallery. It is said—as in the old tale of Pygmalion and Galatea—that Mariette, the founder of the museum, fell in love with the statue but that—unlike Galatea—the lovely Ameneritus did not come to life.

The Cairo Museum is unique in many respects, not the least being that visitors are allowed to take photographs of anything they wish. This sometimes proves disconcerting to international film stars, who are apt to find themselves face-to-face with an avid photographer wishing for nothing better than to have a famous star standing by one of his subjects.

Famous film stars had begun coming to Egypt again, sometimes on holiday but more often on location. During the making of *Cairo Road*, a British film about smuggling narcotics, guests on Shepherd's terrace watched a scene being taken in Ibrahim Pasha Street in which Eric Portman took part. Much of *Cairo Road* was filmed in the Canal Zone and a very amusing rumour spread from there to the terrace tables which no one bothered to verify or disprove. It appeared that one scene was filmed on the Suez Canal at a frontier post, which showed men, who had crossed over from the Sinai desert, being searched by Customs officials for hashish. To give an air of realism, genuine 'Hashish Sniffers' had been enrolled among the extras. 'Sniffers' are well-

known to smugglers. They have supersensitive noses and can smell the drug however well-hidden it may be. The ways of sneaking hashish through the Customs are many and varied; it can be hidden in a camel's mouth, woven in baskets, sewn in garments and many other places, but it is difficult to hide its faint distinctive smell—save by unorthodox methods. For instance, camels have been forced to swallow small metal cylinders of the drug and when safely beyond officialdom's reach the animals are slain and the cylinders removed. When to the extremely high price the drug fetches a further sum can be added for the carcass of the beast—which is sold as meat—it is understandable how tempting the whole procedure becomes. The method of forced feeding sometimes 'boomerangs' and it has been known for a camel to regurgitate such cylinders in the Customs' shed. Nowadays, frontier posts have 'metal detector' machines which can spot this trick by the aid of a moving needle, but in the ordinary way smugglers cannot bamboozle a 'Sniffer'.

In the filming at the frontier everything was going according to plan. The travellers had disembarked at the Customs' post and the ferry which had brought them moved slowly back across the canal; cameras were poised and turning. The director was delighted because the 'Sniffers' were acting so realistically, and the other extras portrayed just the right amount of apprehension. Although the acting was superb, the script did not call for such violent gesticulation or shouting. Everyone was becoming excited and the director shouted 'Cut', to the perspiring photographers who had been intent on catching every detail. The cameras ceased to turn, but the actors did not cease to act. Some wily hashish smugglers had thought the making of the film would provide a means of carrying on their nefarious business and had signed on as extras, and would certainly have got into Egypt with the drug had not the 'Sniffers' discovered the plot.

Many biblical and historical stories have been filmed in Egypt since then, *The Egyptian*, *Land of the Pharaohs* and *Joseph and His Brethren*. The most grandiose of the television era was Cecil B. de Mille's *The Ten Commandments* with one of the most

ambitious film sets ever constructed in the desert. It represented the walls and gates of ancient Tanis and stretched from the Pyramids of Giza to the Pyramids at Sakkara. The film ended in real romance, for the Egyptian Cavalry officer, Major Abbas el-Boghdadli, who acted as riding-instructor to Charlton Heston in handling the Pharaonic war chariots, fell in love with Cecilia Harper, granddaughter of Cecil B. de Mille. Shortly after the completion of the film they were married.

The Cairene is a confirmed movie-addict and new air-conditioned super-cinemas had sprung up in Cairo, rejoicing in the same names as such theatres in other capitals—Radio, Metro and Rivoli. The latter was built by the Rank organization and seated some 3,000 persons. Going to films was particularly popular in the warm weather when the 'open air' cinemas came into their own and the others 'rolled back' their roofs. One, the Diana, was close by Shepherd's and films could be viewed from many of the hotel balconies. Egyptian films were coming to the fore, new studios near Mena House were hives of activity but American and British films continued to be favourites and were shown with French and Arabic sub-titles.

Camelia, the first Egyptian star to become internationally known, was often seen at Shepherd's. She had played one of the main roles in *Cairo Road*. Her rapid ascent to fame caused one American film critic to describe her full moulded mouth as 'bee-stung lips'. Unfortunately she met an untimely death in an aircraft crash over the desert. Lilia, who is not only a gifted actress but has a charming singing-voice, became her successor. Like many other film stars she has made her home in a penthouse, not in London, New York or Paris, but above an exclusive block of flats, the Mobilia Building in Cairo.

Since the war, Cairo had become alarmingly full of motor vehicles. Drivers kept their hands on car-horns, feeling this gave them the right of way, and the street vendors outside Shepherd's became so talented in leaping out of the way to avoid being killed, that any one of them could have flung himself into *Spectre de la Rose* with as much aplomb as a Nijinsky.

In spite of Cairo's sleek cars, visitors at the pyramids still enjoyed riding camels in the orthodox way to see the sphinx. One fine autumn morning Mr. and Mrs. Harris arrived at the pyramids with one of Shepheard's dragomen. They wished to hire camels and after some deliberation the guide picked out two well-groomed animals from a handsome young Egyptian, who had a yellow rose tucked behind one ear. The beasts knelt obediently and were mounted. Mrs. Harris was surprised to find how quickly she became accustomed to the camel's unusual gait. She was a pretty girl and as her mount increased his pace the breeze blew her golden hair out behind her. The camel-owner rushed up to her side, admiration written on his fine features.

'Oh, madam, what beauty! what beauty!' he cried. Mrs. Harris was flattered. 'What a romantic place to receive a compliment,' she called back to her husband who was having a little difficulty with his reins.

'You are indeed blessed by Allah, madam!' Mrs. Harris looked down on the handsome young man. He plucked the yellow rose from behind his ear and, threading it through the bridle, said solemnly, 'I bestow this flower on the most beautiful creature at the pyramids—my CAMEL!'

When Shepheard's guests had occasion to go next door to Thomas Cook's they found Mr. Churchill, who had been in Egypt for many years, a mine of information and a teller of amusing tales.

Mr. Churchill employed a retired Egyptian brigadier to collect any large outstanding debts owing to his company. The brigadier was discretion itself and also had remarkable perseverance. The director of a rich concern was very much in debt to Thomas Cook and refused to pay. He was approached twice by the brigadier but remained adamant. The brigadier's third visit resulted in a long day's argument. Finally, the director promised to pay seventy-five per cent of the amount in cash, but he warned the brigadier that he would consider the whole debt discharged if he did this. The brigadier was uncertain what to do.

'May I use your telephone a moment to get in touch with Mr.

Churchill and ask his advice?' he asked. The director was obviously taken aback.

'Do what?' he asked.

'I must ask Mr. Churchill for his advice,' said the brigadier patiently.

'Do not bother to do that,' said the director hastily, 'I will give you the whole amount by cheque. If Thomas Cook can first of all afford to pay a brigadier to collect their debts, and secondly telephone the ex-Prime minister of Britain to ask for advice, who am I to argue?' The director wrote out a cheque and gave it to the brigadier. The latter took it and made a hasty departure.

Tourists frequented many eating-places near Shepherd's, one of the favourites being St. James, a restaurant well-known for its wine and kebab; another was the Kursaal, on the opposite side of Ibrahim Pasha Street, which, though always crowded, was inexpensive and had a delightful tango band. Most fashionable was the Scarabe, an exclusive night-club where members could bring their friends to dine and dance. When the Scarabe was surrounded by plain-clothes policemen, it meant that King Farouk was playing cards in the upstairs gaming-room—but he and his companions were never too engrossed in their gambling to miss the cabaret on the floor below. The show changed often but the same dancer always appeared, a beautiful girl whose 'Danse du Ventre' made her as famous as Samia Gamal.

The Auberge des Pyramids was a fashionable restaurant, also frequented by King Farouk. In the summer there was an outdoor dance floor in an enchanting garden. The inside restaurant was large enough to stage spectacular revues; the *décor* was an ostentatious copy of Shepherd's entrance hall with tall pillars painted with vividly coloured Pharaonic designs. A gipsy band played downstairs in a dimly lit night-club called the 'Véronique'. The King, with an entourage of young men, would usually arrive in time for the revue and, with a bottle of Pepsi-Cola in front of him on his table, would watch the performers with wrapt attention, while the tourists watched him.

A story is told that one night the King was dining at Shepherd's and was attracted by a beautiful young woman who was staying there. Next morning one of the palace equerries called at the hotel desk and inquired who she was. The Swiss clerk replied that the names of guests were never divulged to strangers. The equerry asked to see the hotel registration book. The clerk curtly refused. In the name of the King the equerry demanded to know who the girl was. The Swiss clerk still refused to give the information. The other man grew angry and said if his request was not granted the clerk had better be careful, there would be much trouble. The Swiss shrugged his shoulders and said he was merely obeying orders. The equerry stalked out of the front entrance in a furious temper.

A short time later two armed guards walked to the desk and the Swiss clerk was told he had to leave immediately. He was given ten minutes in which to pack his bags, after which he would be escorted to Cairo station. The reason?—*Lèse-majesté*.

It was not always the King who pursued attractive women—many pursued him. The manager was approached by a beautiful and well-known film star who asked him to arrange an introduction to the King. The manager demurred, saying he was very sorry but in his position such a thing was unthinkable.

'Why do you wish for an introduction?' he asked curiously. 'You are famous and can have any choice of suitors.'

'Well, for one thing,' the film star said, 'I am terribly in debt, I live a most extravagant life, and I could leave Egypt with a clear conscience if I could pay my debts.'

'A clear conscience!' laughed the manager. 'No, I am very sorry, but I cannot make any plans for you to meet the King.'

'I would rather have you help me, but if you won't, I shall think of someone else. I will meet him—whether you help me or not.'

It was not difficult for the film actress to get a small fifth column to work. She managed to get an introduction to one of the King's entourage, and asked him to let her know when the King was next dining at Shepherd's. Furthermore, she suggested that



he be a companion of the King that particular night so that if she was noticed by His Majesty he could be told who she was.

All went according to her plan. Half-way through dinner the King's friend drew His Majesty's attention to the doorway. Through it glided the film star in a black, form-revealing dress that looked as if it had been grafted on her. She walked slowly across the room, undulating with each step, she lowered her head and her long blond hair fell over her eyes. As she went by the King's table she tossed her head back with a little *moue* of annoyance so that her fair hair was thrown back into place. She looked at the King with large blue eyes, then lowered her long, sweeping lashes discreetly and continued walking slowly across the room and out the far door.

A few days later the actress knocked at the manager's office door. 'Come in,' he called. She entered with a smug smile. 'I thought you would like to know that I have met the King,' she said, 'just as I said I would. My debts will be paid—including my bill at Shepherd's.'

'In fact your conscience is clear?'

'Yes!—but it is no thanks to you. However, I thought you might like to know that I always get what I want!' And with this remark the film actress left the room, closing the door gently behind her. The manager looked at the closed door pensively for a few seconds then, shrugging his shoulders, went on with his work.

Shepherd's guests, however blasé, were never at a loss as to what to do for amusement and there was something to suit all tastes; bridge for those who wished to stay in the hotel, bathing, yachting, gymkhanas and other outdoor sports for the more energetic and a small magazine called *This Week in Cairo*, which told of forthcoming events and places to visit, could always be obtained at the reception desk. As in the days of Samuel Shepherd, attending local festivals was the most popular pastime among tourists, perhaps because of the novelty, and dragomen were only too pleased to make the arrangements because they enjoyed them too. Two world wars had made no difference to

these age-old ceremonies. The main one was the departure to Mecca of the Holy Carpet which is presented each year by the Egyptian Government.

During the last month of the Islamic year Muslims from all corners of the earth gather in groups for religious rites. Those who can afford it flock to the Holy City of Mecca, which each Muslim tries to visit at least once during his lifetime, and it is during the pilgrimage that the Holy Carpet is presented at Mecca. Before it leaves Cairo it is dedicated on one of the city *maidans*, where a gigantic marquee, hung with beautiful Egyptian tapestries, is erected. Troops surround it. The near-by streets are thronged with people for it is a public holiday. From early morning religious leaders, government officials and distinguished guests drive through crowds of excited people to the *maidan*. The Egyptian President, Prime Minister, or whoever takes the leading part, is greeted by a salute of guns after which the national anthem is played.

The procession bearing the precious burden starts from Old Cairo. Special white camels of great endurance are bred by the Omdehs of Assuit to carry the *Kiswa*—as the Holy Carpet is called—but in the parade it is borne coffin-high on the shoulders of hand-picked troops. Valued at some £6,000 the *Kiswa* is made up of several pieces of fine black brocade, exquisitely hand-embroidered with silver and gold.

Camel-riders lead the parade and behind them come, in turn, cameleers playing reed pipes, the *Kiswa*—like a long black glittering dragon—and the howdah—a palanquin of multi-coloured brocades mounted on a camel which is in memory of an Egyptian queen who made the pilgrimage many years ago—then troops with waving green, white and yellow banners inscribed with texts from the Koran.

The colourful procession marches round the *maidan* seven times. After kissing the bridles of the camels chosen to carry the *Kiswa*, the Chief Personage takes a large symbolic key—which gains entrance for the Holy Carpet to the inner sanctuary at Mecca—from a gold-embroidered, green silk bag and hands it to

the 'Emir el Haj'—the Prince of the Pilgrimage. The formalities of departure are now over and the *Kiswa* passes on its way through the crowds who clap their hands and shout blessings as the parade goes by. The procession is known as the *Mahmal*—the 'Carrying'.

In the old days, an elderly sheikh rode in the procession on a camel flanked on either side by huge baskets containing Cats. This was certainly a relic of ancient times when cats were worshipped in Egypt. The practice ceased in 1886.

When the *Kiswa* reaches Mecca, it replaces the one which had been brought over the same route the preceding year. The *Kaaba*, a huge black stone in the courtyard of the Great Mosque, is reverently washed with pure rose water before the new *Kiswa* is placed over it. The old *Kiswa* is cut into many pieces and the King of Saudi Arabia distributes the beautiful remnants to eminent pilgrims. In the meantime, the needlewomen in Cairo have begun to embroider the new *Kiswa*, for it takes exactly twelve months to make.

The Nile, whose annual flooding has brought either life or death to the people of Egypt since time immemorial, plays a part in another festival called 'The Cutting of the Khalig', which gives tourists a fascinating glimpse of Egypt's past.

Centuries ago, at the rising of the river in August, a fair virgin was thrown into the mud-thickened river, it being hoped that her sacrifice would appease the spirit of the swirling current. Today, instead of a maiden, a beautifully dressed doll is thrown into the Nile from a beflagged riverboat. Thousands of holidaymakers throng the banks and cheer when the doll is thrown overboard and sightseers join the happy crowds either on the banks, or in boats that ply up and down the river. As soon as darkness falls, displays of fireworks light up the river and the night sky.

A thousand years ago the Cutting of the Khalig was attended by the Fatimite Caliph, accompanied by ten thousand knights wearing golden armour, studded with jewels and blazoned with the Caliph's name. Behind the knights followed a long line of donkeys, hung with golden trappings. The procession started near

the Mousky and included Moorish, Berber, Persian and Turkish soldiers, while the Caliph and his entourage followed at the rear. An umbrella was held over the royal head and eunuchs swung incense-burners as they walked along. Today, the lavish splendour is gone, but gaiety and laughter still ring out in thankfulness to old Mother Nile for having laid her bounty at her people's feet for yet another year.

The delightful reason for 'Shem el Nessim', another national festival is the celebration of the first day of spring. The name of the holiday means 'Smell the Breeze', and it is fixed by the Coptic calendar for the Monday following Easter Sunday. However, it is not a religious holiday and everybody, irrespective of race, joins in. Jewellery and new clothes are worn on 'Shem el Nessim' and everyone parades in the public parks and gardens to celebrate springtime.

During Ramadan, which in the Muslim faith is similar to the Christian lenten season, visitors are sometimes invited to the mid-night feasts. Ramadan begins when the new moon rises in the ninth month of the Muslim year, and from then for twenty-eight days a strict fast is observed from dawn to sunset. During the fast no water or food may pass the lips of a true believer during daylight—nor may he touch a woman. Muslims say that it is only by drastic fasting that a man's spirit can be free of the flesh and his sins forgiven. Others believe that the prophet ordained the fast that the rich and well-fed should know how the poor and hungry feel and henceforth be more generous.

Working through the day and being up practically all night will tire the strongest man. While it may not be noticeable to the casual visitor living in an hotel, the management are only too well aware of it because servants become exhausted by the day's end.

At sunset believers swallow a little liquid or eat some fruit, but wait until the middle of the night for a real repast. As sunset may not begin at exactly the same time in different parts of the country, no definite minute can be fixed for ending the fast. A cannon is fired in each town at whatever time the local dignitaries decide sunset has begun.

During Ramadan, crowds gather at sunset along the banks of the Nile, clutching slices of water-melon in their hot hands, so that when the signal sounds no time may be lost in assuaging their thirst. Few men make the mistake of over-drinking which results only in nausea. Should the Muslim be a wealthy merchant, he retires and sleeps in the usual way at night, while servants prepare the main meal which is approximately at two o'clock in the morning. His household is awakened when the meal is ready and all sit down to a substantial repast, after which there is talking and smoking before retiring to bed again.

During Ramadan the sick and the young do not fast, while there are various circumstances in which dispensation is granted—for instance a journey.

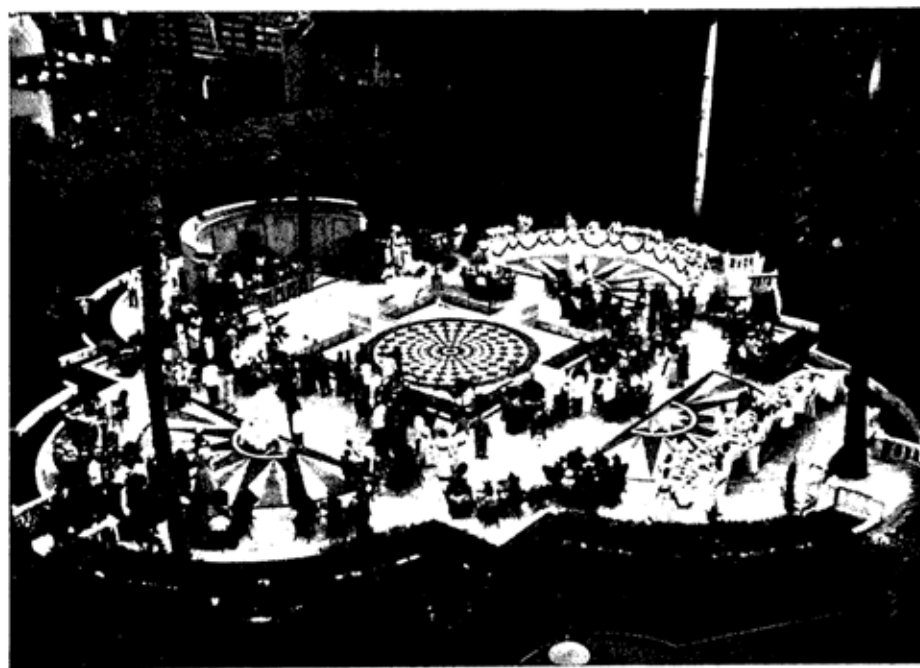
King Zog of Albania was staying at Shepherd's when King Farouk invited him for an *istah*—the main meal at night during Ramadan. During the preceding day King Zog and his entourage were unhappy about the strict fasting imposed on them by the hotel staff. Then it was suddenly remembered that Muslims 'in transit' need not adhere to the rules so they succumbed and were served luncheon in one of the private salons.

Well after midnight during Ramadan, dragomen will take visitors to parts of Cairo where night has been turned into day. Fasting has ceased, the tension of the long, hot day is over and the cafés are full of carefree people. There is an excited chatter of children who stay up with their parents. The news of the day is discussed while moonlight seeps down through awnings of the frontless shops. A brisk trade in food goes on. As the moon wanes dragomen take sleepy tourists back to their hotels. The streets gradually empty towards dawn, but the city is scarcely at rest before the sun rises on another day of Ramadan.



*Beduin horse dancing display in  
Shepherd's garden on the occasion of  
King Farouk's marriage to Farida*

*A wedding reception held on the  
outdoor dance floor in the garden*





*'Black Saturday' (photograph A. G. Mitchell)*



*The famous terrace after 'Black Saturday' (photograph Warwick Ronald)*

## 15

‘May I see the Manager?’

A SHEPHEARD'S Hotel manager had just finished his morning's work. He felt tired and was glad to be alone. Lighting a cigarette he leaned back in his chair and glanced out of the window. He had been too busy to notice that the usual blue sky was turning to an ominous yellow and now he knew why he was feeling weary, a sand-storm was beginning—the dread *khamzin*. Swirling spirals of sand would be dancing crazily across the floor of the desert like vast, unearthly spinning-tops. Bedouin and their beasts would be seeking what shelter they could before the real storm broke. Then hot, gusty winds would stir up great sheets of sand particles which would obliterate everything. By the way the blue of the sky was blotted out he knew that spinning clouds of infinitesimal grains of sand were already sweeping through the city and people in the streets would be finding their teeth gritty and their nostrils irritated by the eddying dust.

There was a knock at the door but the manager did not answer; instead he took the receiver off his telephone and in crisp tones ordered that the hotel windows and shutters be closed immediately. He cradled the receiver as one of the *safragis* entered the room.

‘I did knock, sir,’ he said hesitatingly, ‘but when I heard you on the telephone I decided to come in quickly to close your windows.’

‘Quite right, Abdul! I have just rung the housekeeper to see that everything is shut up right away.’ The *safragi* finished fastening the shutters. ‘I’m afraid this is going to be a bad *khamzin*, sir.’

The manager did not answer but gestured to Abdul to leave the room. As the door was opened he heard someone ask, ‘May I see the manager?’ Abdul looked over his shoulder questioningly. The



manager smiled and nodded his head. A man entered. He looked very angry and red of face. 'Good morning, Mr. King,' said the manager, 'what can I do for you?'

'Change this damn' weather! This is my first day here—and look at it outside. I took my wife out to have a cocktail on the terrace before lunch and the place is unbearable. The air is hot and dusty and there is nobody about. My travel agent told me that Egypt had a perfect climate.'

'Nothing is ever quite perfect, sir,' smiled the manager, 'this storm will not last long.'

'One of your servants told me it might last three or four days.'

'That is most exceptional. These storms occur perhaps three or four times a year, but they are usually over in a day—sometimes in an hour or two.'

'Your servant also said the temperature will probably reach one hundred degrees.'

'Perhaps, sir, but you will not notice it very much at Shepherd's. Everyone remarks on our high ceilings and cool corridors. Do you and your wife play bridge?'

'Well, yes!' admitted Mr. King grudgingly '—but I did not come to Egypt to play bridge.'

'Do let me take you along to the bridge-room for the moment, by the time you've played a few rubbers, the storm may be over.'

The manager had only just returned from seeing the Kings settled in the card-room when there was another knock at his door—a timid one this time.

'Come in!' he called wearily. He knew of old that the khamsins affected both visitors and residents and it would be a day when small complaints would loom out of all proportion. A pretty, middle-aged woman came in. She was plump, with faded blond hair but her blue eyes had lost none of their youthfulness.

'I am sorry to disturb you, but I would value your advice so much if you have a moment to spare.'

'Of course, madam! I should be pleased to help you in any way I can.'

'Do you mean that?' she regarded him coyly.

'You are Mrs. Feeney are you not?'

'Yes! How clever of you to remember my name.'

'Are you worried about something—the storm perhaps?'

'Oh, no!'

'What can I do for you Mrs. Feeney?' At least the khamsin had not annoyed one guest.

'Well, you see I am staying here by myself.'

'Yes?'

'I have never been in Egypt before and I would hate to do anything silly. I would value your advice as to what to do and what not to do.'

'Do you mean that you wish to observe the customs of the country?'

'In a way. Who are the sort of people I ought to avoid when I am out alone?'

'Well, Mrs. Feeney, the question does not arise. We have hotel guides and you can either go out with a large party or a small one—by car, by carriage, what you please.'

'I should like to go out alone.'

'That could be quite easily arranged, the hotel dragomen are completely trustworthy and will see that you do not get charged too much for anything. I can arrange for one of them to take you wherever you wish to go. Many of our guests prefer to go sight-seeing alone.'

'Could I go alone, completely alone to shop?'

'Why, of course; not the alleyways, but then you would not go into those in any large city. The main streets are as safe here as anywhere.'

'Oh, good! I might decide to go sightseeing after shopping.'

'Well, get a taxi back to the hotel and we will see that you are looked after.'

'There seem to be many nice guides in the street, might I not hire one of these?'

'I do not advise it,' said the manager, 'you might get a good man, you might not. Some of these men suggest the most hair-raising trips.'

'What trips?'

'Well,' said the manager laughing, 'some of them propose a night in the desert, in a tent hung with tapestries and food served by moonlight—that sort of trip would be asking for trouble if you were alone.'

'I see what you mean. I am glad I came. It is very difficult for a woman travelling alone in a strange country. I hope I have not taken up too much of your time?'

'That is perfectly all right.' The manager rose to his feet and saw Mrs. Feeney out of his office. He had just closed the door when there was another knock. He opened it and outside stood Monsieur V——, a wealthy owner of several large departmental stores in France.

'May I see you a moment?'

'Certainly, do come and take a seat. Do you smoke?' The manager offered a box of cigars. Monsieur V—— took one thoughtfully and settled in his chair.

'Look here,' he began, 'I have come to have a little talk. My wife and I find Shepherd's delightful, our suite is most comfortable and the food quite excellent, but one little thing has happened which I should like to point out.'

'Yes?'

'We arrived with some fifteen pieces of luggage and only fourteen were delivered to our suite.'

'But, Monsieur V——, you have been here a fortnight. Have you only just discovered this loss?'

'No! I noticed it at the time, but it was such a small matter I did not bother you about it. It was a leather bag containing my own personal toilet articles, some books and a few personal things. I thought it might turn up.'

'I have heard nothing about it. Our staff is very reliable, but I will certainly make inquiries.'

'Do not bother, it was only a small bag. The main thing is that we are enjoying our holiday. I must be off to lunch and not keep you from your work. Good day!' Monsieur V—— had not lit his cigar and, almost as an afterthought, put it in his breast pocket

as he walked towards the door. He closed it carefully behind him. The manager looked worried. There was something about Monsieur V—— that he did not like. However, he would forget Monsieur V—— for the moment. He was feeling hungry and would go to lunch. He opened the door and came face to face with one of his *bêtes noires*—handsome Rudolf Piers.

'I believe you sent for me yesterday,' said the new arrival.

'Yes, I did,' said the manager with a sigh. 'Why didn't you come?'

'I was very busy,' said Rudolf walking into the office and sitting down in a chair without waiting to be asked. The manager went back to his desk and sat down facing Rudolf.

'Rudolf! You must not come to the terrace again.'

'Come, now, that is hardly polite. The terrace is open to the public.'

'I cannot have men of your type worrying the guests.'

Rudolf laughed. 'Many of your lonely women guests would not say that.'

'I have everyone to think of, not just a few sex-starved women. There are other ways of making money.'

'But not so much, my dear sir.'

'No doubt, but I am warning you this type of thing must stop.'

'I do not think you are in a position to stop me doing anything. I do not harm anyone.' Rudolf pulled a small pistol from his pocket. 'I should hate to hurt the manager of Shephard's, but you had better not try me too far.'

'I think you must be out of your mind. Put that dangerous thing away,' said the manager, his heart beating more quickly than usual.

'I suppose you think I would not use this?'

'You could, but it would be stupid because you would have to pay a high price—perhaps your own life.' The manager hoped he sounded calm. Rudolf pocketed his weapon. 'I just wish to say before I leave your office that I do no harm to anyone. If women like me it is no fault of mine. If I make money out of them it is no business of yours. Why stop me having tea on the terrace? Stop

your guests running after me instead.' Rudolf's voice shook with emotion.

'I refuse to discuss anything further with you, Rudolf, but I warn you that if you do not stop importuning my guests I shall report you to the police.'

'You could prove nothing and only make a fool of yourself.' Rudolf produced his pistol again and passed it back and forth between his hands.

'Do not come to this office again in a threatening mood. Your life would not be worth much if you shot me!'

'I am not the fool you think. I just wished you to know I have a weapon. Should I use it against you I will do so with great cunning—and at the right time.' The manager stood up. 'Good day, Rudolf!' Rudolf stood up also. 'Good day,' he said, pocketing his pistol again and, with feline grace, glided out of the room. The manager put his hand to his forehead. It was damp. He decided it was not lunch he needed but a good stiff whisky and soda.

As he left his office Mr. King came up to him, a smile wreathing his face. 'Look at the sun.' Mr. King pointed towards the entrance door where sunrays were busily dancing on the glass of the swinging door. 'The sky is blue again. My wife and I are going to the pyramids in an hour's time. It was the shortest storm I ever remember. You said it might be over by the time we played a few rubbers of bridge. Your servants say you are always right.'

'I wish that was true,' smiled the manager.

Late that evening the manager went out to the terrace to get a breath of fresh air. The storm might never have been and there was a glorious sunset. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Rudolf handing a woman into a taxi and then jump in after her. The manager sighed. One of his worst headaches was keeping men like Rudolf and other unsavoury people off the terrace—an almost impossible job. Framed notices inside the hotel warned waiters—in Arabic and French—that they were not to consort with or serve undesirable clients. The terrace, open to the public and peppered with well-known personalities, drew unscrupulous people like a magnet, and how was one to say which man or

pretty, well-dressed girl was up to no good. There had never been a rule against unescorted women on the terrace, and there was no cover charge; anyone could sit down, order a cup of coffee and stay as long as he or she pleased. Lately it had been necessary to place small cardboard notices under the ash-trays stating that something to eat must be ordered with each cup of coffee.

The manager had noticed that a very beautiful, unknown girl had become an *habituée* of the terrace and he had been keeping an eye on her. She was here again this evening and sat at the table which Rudolf had vacated. He saw her pass a note to a man at the table next to her—a guest at the hotel—who tore it up and placed the pieces in an ash-tray before moving to another table. The manager had been suspicious of the girl's intentions for some time. He walked up to her table and asked her to come into the hotel with him. Once in the privacy of his office, he regarded her gravely and said he had seen her try to solicit a guest, and would report the matter to the police unless she stayed away from the terrace. The girl flew into a rage and said she was the daughter of a Pasha and how dare he talk to her like that. When asked which Pasha she gave the name of a very well-known man whom the manager knew.

'I know the Pasha well. I also happen to know he has no children!' he said.

'He is my father. How dare you say he is not.'

'I do not know or care who your father is, but I want you to promise me you will not worry the guests on the terrace.'

'My father would be furious if he heard you talking to me like this.'

'The Pasha is actually in the Moorish Hall at this very moment. Would you like me to send for him to verify what you are saying?'

'Yes!' cried the girl furiously, 'get him in.'

'Do you mean what you say?'

'Yes—get him in.'

'All right!'

The manager wrote a note, rang for a *safragi* and told him to give it to the Pasha.

'You had better sit down,' he said to the girl. She did so and the adversaries regarded each other in silence.

The *safragi* returned with the Pasha, a rotund, cheerful man.

'Good evening, Pasha,' said the manager. 'I am sorry to disturb you but this girl claims you are her father. I know it is quite untrue.'

The girl was eyeing the Pasha provocatively. She crossed one shapely leg over the other.

'I have told the manager you are my father. It is true, isn't it?'

The Pasha looked at the manager and winked.

'Do you mean to say this girl is your daughter, Pasha?' asked the manager icily.

'Yes!' said the Pasha.

'Will you kindly see that your daughter does not hang around the terrace?'

'I will see that she is otherwise engaged,' said the Pasha.

'Come, my dear, we must not waste the manager's time,' and taking the girl's arm he led her towards the door. The Pasha looked back at the manager behind the girl's back and winked a second time.

'And the servants say I am always right,' said the manager to himself bitterly.

The following afternoon he saw the girl was sitting on the terrace again. Rudolf sauntered jauntily up the steps. Two other girls were sitting at separate tables who were not residents of the hotel. Things are going too far, thought the manager to himself. Suddenly he had a brainwave. He walked back into the hotel with a smile on his face. Some thirty minutes later, men in white overalls arrived laden down with ladders and tins of paint. *Safragis* began stacking tables and chairs, then took them into the hotel. A waiter nailed a large notice to one of the awning posts—Shepherd's terrace was to be closed for an indefinite period while decorating went on.

The following morning the manager came out onto the terrace before breakfast. He had slept well the preceding night, the sun was shining, the air was crisp and the smell of new paint hung in

the air. He felt pleased with life. He was standing watching a man who was precariously perched on a ladder when one of the housekeepers came bustling out of the entrance.

'Excuse me, sir,' she said, 'I hate to disturb you so early in the morning but I am a little worried.'

'Oh?'

'Well, sir, Mrs. Feeney's bed was not slept in last night and nobody has seen her since yesterday lunch-time.'

'Mrs. Feeney?' the manager looked puzzled; then he remembered the faded blonde with the vivid blue eyes who had called to see him during the khamsin. Before he could say anything a taxi drew up at the bottom of the steps and out stepped Mrs. Feeney herself. The housekeeper's eyes widened.

'You do not need to worry,' he said to the housekeeper hastily, 'there is Mrs. Feeney, no doubt she has spent the night away with friends.'

'Oh, I need not have bothered you after all,' said the housekeeper with relief in her voice. 'I will carry on with my work.'

The manager sniffed the new paint again with pleasure. It was still a lovely morning and he was determined Mrs. Feeney should not stop him enjoying his breakfast. He looked at Mrs. Feeney—but she did not look at him; her colour rose as he stepped aside to let her pass. Her shoes were dusty and left a sandy trail behind them. . . .

After breakfast the manager was on his way to his office when Monsieur V—— appeared along the corridor with a middle-aged, well-preserved woman who wore a lemon tweed suit. 'I am leaving today and just wished to say what a delightful time we have spent here. This is my wife.' The manager shook hands with Madame V——. 'Won't you come into my office?' he asked.

'Yes! we have come to pay you a little visit.'

'Do come in and sit down. I presume that you found your missing case. None of my staff knew anything about it and as I did not hear from you again I knew it must have turned up.'

'No! it did not, I am sorry to say,' said Monsieur V——

'But why did you not let me know?'



'My dear fellow, it was a small thing,' Monsieur V—— waved the whole matter aside.

'You must not say that, chéri,' gently chided his wife.

'You see,' she continued turning to the manager, 'my husband hates to make a fuss about anything but that bag had irreplaceable things in it, his toilet articles, silver-backed brushes and so on.'

'Are you quite sure that the bag arrived with you?'

'Of course,' said Madame V—— indignantly.

'My dear, do not make a fuss. What will the manager think of us?'

'I do not care what he thinks. Before we pay our bill I feel he ought to know that the bag has been stolen by someone in this hotel.'

'My dear,' said Monsieur V—— getting to his feet, 'you must not get excited. You know what women are,' he said helplessly to the manager. 'It is nobody's fault. Just one of those unfortunate things that happens sometimes, even at the best hotels. Come! let us go to the desk and I will settle our bill.' Monsieur V—— took his wife's hand. She tugged herself free.

'I will not leave this room until we get your missing bag!'

'Madame, do not upset yourself,' said the manager pleasantly, 'I should do as your husband suggests.'

'Aren't you going to do anything?' asked Madame V—— in a rage. 'What do you mean by treating us like this—and at Shepherd's of all places.'

'I suggest you do as your husband says, madame.'

'You—you——' Words failed Madame V——, she turned to her husband. 'Don't stand there like that. Do something, this is the first time an hotel has NOT PAID US COMPENSATION!'

At this point Monsieur V—— flushed a deep purple, and dragging his expostulating wife by the arm, hurried her out of the room.

Strange, thought the manager to himself, how I knew there was something not quite right about that story from the beginning, the man's face was shifty. He glanced at a framed picture on

his desk. It contained a Christmas card in the form of a poem—with apologies to Rudyard Kipling's 'If'—from Freddy Elwert who had sent it from Zürich. He read it through, smiling when he came to the fifth verse.

If you can judge good wine and when to buy it,  
And know just how to store and when to sell;  
Or recognize a vintage when you try it;  
If you can talk on cuvées and Moselle;  
If you can buy best Scotch and help to cook it,  
And understand the secrets of each dish,  
Or cut and store fresh meat and nicely hook it,  
If you can tie a bird or skin a fish.

If you can speak Italian like a native,  
And put a Russian stranger at his ease,  
If you can charm and be appreciative,  
In Spanish, French and German-Portuguese,  
If you can always do and say what's proper  
And mix with Court and Church and Stage and Law,  
If you can mix with Silver, Gold and Copper;  
And get on well with rich and well with poor.

If you can be a king of variation,  
And feel the public pulse and make it throb.  
If you can love the wondrous animation,  
And all the teeming problems of your job.  
If you can fight tremendous opposition,  
If you can get the penny and the bun.  
And view a hundred different propositions,  
And visualize the prospect in each one.

If you can make a convert of a miser,  
Though it may bring your powers to the test,  
If you can make him feel so much the wiser,  
In persuading him to eat and drink the best,

*Shepherd's Hotel*

If you can meet a man who's lost his temper,  
Who slates you left and right for all you've done,  
If you can tell yourself he's got distemper  
And then convince him that he's had good fun.

If you can read a face and what's inside it,  
And know all men and women at a glance,  
Or guess a trickster's trick before he's tried it,  
If you can tell just when to take a chance.  
If you can face a Board that's thrifty minded,  
And tell it how you want some money spent,  
If you can open eyes that have been blinded,  
And then with purest logic gain consent.

If you can win your staff yet be respected,  
And make them part and parcel of your plan,  
If you can know they'll do just what's expected,  
And feel they're behind you to a man.  
If you can live a day with heavy onus,  
And remember even then, when day is done,  
That someone on your staff deserves a bonus,  
You'll make a HOTEL MANAGER, my son.

The manager wrote a note and rang for a *safragi*. When the man arrived he said, 'Please take this to the doctor. Wait until he reads it and if he can come and have coffee with me see that a tray for two is sent in here.' The *safragi* went off on his errand and the manager sat back at his desk and lit a cigarette. He thought to himself that the hotel was lucky to have such a fine doctor—and such a diplomatic one. Only the previous night the doctor had come to his rescue. An American couple had returned from a party with an Egyptian friend. All three had obviously drunk too much and the wife decided not to go upstairs with her husband but to go on to another party with the Egyptian. There was a scene. The husband insisted that his wife come upstairs, the wife refused and the Egyptian, deciding as people began to gather that discretion was the better part of valour, hurried out of the hotel.

The manager had contrived to entice the quarrelling couple upstairs to the privacy of their own room, but there they had continued to shout at each other and the wife had hurled a standard-lamp to the floor and become hysterical. The manager telephoned for the doctor, who came immediately. Sizing the situation up at a glance the doctor smilingly said he would 'take over'. The manager had left the room thankfully.

The *safragi* returned to say the doctor would join the manager in a few minutes. When the doctor arrived he said, 'I am so glad you asked me in for coffee, I wanted to tell you what happened after you left last night.'

'I felt rather guilty leaving you to cope with such an unruly pair!'

'Oh! it was not too bad. I had my bag, as you know, and suggested an injection of luminal to steady the wife's nerves and that soon had a tranquillizing effect. Her husband was in no condition to help her get into bed. He was sitting on the bathroom floor and refused to get up, so I had to help her undress. A bit difficult, especially when I tried to get her two legs into one pyjama leg—not really my line of country!' The doctor smiled: 'However, I managed, then I gave her a further injection and she quietened down nicely while I dragged the husband into the bedroom, helped him undress as well and got him to bed. Have you heard from them this morning?'

'They telephoned down for their breakfast to be sent to their room.'

'Oh, they'll be all right,' said the doctor, 'and while I am here I must tell you about a little joke that has been played in the hotel lately.' He settled more comfortably in his chair and lit a cigarette.

'You know I attend Lady Celia—at the Semiramis Hotel? She is a dear old soul but is so strict with her two nieces who live with her it is quite unbelievable. She never allows them out without her.'

But they were staying here last week, Doctor. I know them well, very nice girls. They were staying here alone.'

'I know, but listen! The girls saved quite a bit of money ostensibly to go on a sightseeing tour to Jerusalem. Lady Celia approved of this and did not mind them going with a party of elderly people. They know one of the telephone girls here at Shepherd's and asked if she would help them play a little ruse and she agreed. Instead of going to Jerusalem they came to Shepherd's and the telephone operator would ring the Semiramis and say, "King David Hotel, Jerusalem, calling", and then one of the nieces would talk to the aunt. They spent a whole week here without Lady Celia being any the wiser and all their friends kept the secret. I must admit that I myself went out on one party with them, together with some other people from the British Embassy. I had a twinge of conscience a couple of days ago when I went to see their aunt. You know, she always insists I have a glass of champagne with her before I leave and while I was drinking it I suddenly felt the joke had gone far enough. I said I would fetch her nieces from the station when they returned from Palestine. She was delighted. When I got back to Shepherd's I told the girls their luck could not hold out much longer and that they had better go back to their aunt. They agreed. Their ally made one last telephone call from the "King David Hotel" and one of the nieces told Lady Celia they would be returning the following day. I drove them home in my car.'

'I would not have taken part in that deep-laid plot,' smiled the manager.

'That is why, my dear chap, you knew nothing about it,' laughed the doctor.

'Well, I can also tell you something amusing,' said the manager. 'Whether it is true or not I will leave you to judge; it is also about the Semiramis. You know that sometimes the Aga Khan stays here and sometimes at the Semiramis?'

'Yes!'

'The story goes that he sent inquiries to the Semiramis as to what it would cost him per night if he had two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a sitting-room. The answer was fifteen pounds. Later the same day a rather portly gentleman in an ill-fitting suit,

long beard and strong glasses, walked into the Semiramis foyer to the reception desk and the following conversation took place:

'“What is the daily cost for a sitting-room, two bedrooms and two bathrooms?”

'The reception clerk looked the portly gentleman over, at his baggy trousers, dusty shoes, the ill-kempt beard and the squashed hat which had been pulled well down over the man's forehead.

'“Nine pounds, sir!”

'“Why did you quote fifteen pounds then?” The portly gentleman tugged at his beard. It came away in his hand and disclosed the angry features of—the Aga Khan!’

The two men laughed.

'When the Aga Khan leaves Shephard's I love watching the ceremony with which he tips the staff,' said the doctor.

Guests enjoyed the unusual spectacle as well. Just before departure, the Aga Khan would go to the terrace and sitting in a comfortable chair, the Begum seated on his right, the servants lined up in front of him, would dispense largess to each according to his status. Should a new *safragi* hope to get more than his share by coming up a second time, a gentle tug on the sleeve from the Begum would cause the Aga Khan to eye the culprit with great severity and the man would slink away with downcast eyes.

The terrace was always full to overflowing when it was known that a distinguished visitor was about to arrive. The day that Moussadek was expected not only were the terrace tables full, but extra police were stationed by the hotel and crowds of people gathered along the street. The manager waited on the exact spot by the front entrance, where so many managers before him had waited to receive important guests. A cheer and the chanted words, 'Moussadek! Moussadek!' made him advance to the top of the steps. The thin figure of the most influential man in Persia—so soon to bring adversity to his country through the chaos he made of the oil industry—was coming up in spritely fashion, a retinue of his fellow countrymen close on his heels and behind them came a mass of unruly youths. 'Moussadek! Moussadek!' they shouted as they swarmed up the steps and pushed their way

through the tables. Some of the guests looked worried—not at all certain whether the mob was for or against the new arrival. Police were having difficulty restraining the crowd below the steps.

The manager guided his distinguished visitor through the hall to a waiting lift. When they emerged on the first floor, youths had already raced up the staircase and were running along the corridor to meet them, still chanting 'Moussadek! Moussadek!' One of the great man's retinue held up his hand. Immediately the shouting ceased. He opened a little cloth bag he was carrying and lavishly distributed silver coins, after which the youths made off downstairs.

In the meantime the manager and Moussadek, who delighted in the French language and spoke it extremely well, were discussing plans for his visit. The manager led his guest to one of the spacious suites overlooking the garden at the back of the hotel.

'Before I leave you, Your Excellency, I must say what a pleasure it is to find you looking so well,' said the manager, 'the Egyptian Prime Minister, Nahas Pasha, is waiting in a private room downstairs and has asked me to see if you will receive him right away?'

Moussadek's animated conversation came to an abrupt halt. His spritely step faltered, consternation spread over the faces of his retinue.

'I am an old, ill man,' he said weakly, 'I must go to bed immediately. Tell the Prime Minister I shall receive him, but I am afraid he will have to come to my bedside.'

The manager bowed and made his departure. He went downstairs and gave Nahas Pasha the message. The Prime Minister looked worried. 'Is he too ill to receive me?'

'Oh, no, Your Excellency,' said the manager truthfully.

'Perhaps we should give him a few minutes to rest after his long journey.'

'Yes! I quite agree. Then I should like you to take me to him,' said the Prime Minister.

A short time later the manager knocked at Moussadek's door. 'Come in,' said a feeble voice. The two men entered. Moussadek's



*Charles Müller,  
Managing Director  
during the Second  
World War*

*(Below left)  
Manager of the thirties,  
'Freddy of Shepherd's'*

*(Below right)  
Antoine Foerster—last  
manager of the old  
Shepherd's Hotel*







*Vaulted entrance to the 'new' Shepheard's Hotel. Left to right Mr. R. Woodward, manager Thos. Cook & Son Egypt; Mr. M. J. Hermand, General Manager, The Shepheard's and Egyptian Hotels Company; Mr. Joe Renson, Vice Chairman, The Shepheard's and Egyptian Hotels Company; Mr. Arthur Turner, Assistant General Manager, Thos. Cook & Son London*

*The hall porter counter of the 'new' Shepheard's, with Mr. Mahmoud Taalab, Chief Hall porter, and Mr. Kamal El Dine Hussein behind the counter (photograph Egyptian State Tourist Administration)*



*President Gamal Abdul Nasser leaving Shepheard's Hotel on the day of inauguration July 1957*



thin frame was clad in striped pyjamas, and he was propped up in bed with a couple of pillows. His eyes filled with tears as he looked at Nahas Pasha. 'What we do for our countries,' he said sadly, holding out a frail hand. Nahas Pasha grasped it gently, his own eyes filling with tears. The manager left the room closing the door softly behind him.

He went back to the terrace. The police had dispersed the crowd and, as far as the guests were concerned, everything was back to normal—but not for the manager. Each time a political leader arrived he seemed to bring a larger entourage than the last one, and these extra people had to be dovetailed into the hotel as well as special police officers and policemen. The officers he fitted in with the guests, the men with the staff and in some extraordinary way they all blended into the life of Shepherd's.

One of the VIP guests the manager enjoyed welcoming more than any other was Count Folke Bernadotte, a member of the Swedish Royal family. The Count stayed at Shepherd's when passing through Cairo on his many missions as the United Nations mediator between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine. Both men were keenly interested in boy scouts and had many discussions about the movement. The manager revered the Count as a truly great man and was delighted to see his tall, slender figure enter the hotel. One afternoon the manager came out on the terrace for a moment and noticed the Count seated with friends at one of the small tables. There was a shattering crash from inside the hotel that startled everyone except the Count. He looked up and caught the manager's eye. The manager was never to forget the expression. It was as if Bernadotte had knowledge of his sudden death which was to take place a few days later. He looked at the manager with such compassion and understanding that for a few seconds their eyes were locked and the latter felt a great sadness well up within him. The expression flitted from the Count's face, but the look that had passed between them remained in the manager's mind. The following day he bade the Count good-bye, and with a joke on his lips, Count Bernadotte went down the terrace steps for the last time.

A week later he was driving in a convoy of three cars in Jerusalem when the road was suddenly blocked by a Jewish jeep. A man got out and came up to the car in which the Count was seated. Members of the convoy thought the stranger wished to see their special passes. The man thrust an automatic gun through the open window and shot Bernadotte at point-blank range. Six bullets entered his body—one straight through the heart.

Shepherd's manager heard of the brutal assassination with a sense of great personal loss. It seemed impossible that such a devoted humanitarian as the Count, who devoted all his time and energy to the cause of peace, should meet such a violent end.

## 16

### Black Saturday

THE 16th January 1952 became known as 'Black Saturday' in Cairo. It was the day Shepheard's Hotel was razed to the ground. It began as any other day at that time of year; the sun was bright and the kites sailed in circles in the cloudless sky calling with shrill, melancholy cries, the street pedlars arranged their wares on trays with consummate skill and the air floating through the half-opened windows of Shepheard's was fresh and invigorating as the guests sipped their early morning tea.

Walter Bosshard, Swiss correspondent of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, was having breakfast with Arch Steele of the *New York Herald Tribune* in the Moorish Hall, from which they had a view of the terrace. Below the steps a demonstration was marching by shouting anti-British slogans. It was led by young men wearing armbands.

After breakfast the two correspondents went to see Hans Meyer to ask what all the noise was about. Hans told them there appeared to be many demonstrations going on in the city and advised them not to go out until they were over, so the two men decided to return to their rooms and write or read until midday. Shortly after twelve o'clock Bosshard went to Steele's room to return some books he had borrowed; then, in company with Mrs. Steele, the two correspondents went downstairs. As they walked towards the terrace, Meyer approached them and once again warned them not to go out. He looked very worried. 'The Cabaret Bardia is burning,' he said, 'and a mob is throwing all the furniture through the windows onto a fire in Opera Square.'

The Steeles and Bosshard walked out of the front door and from the terrace could see great clouds of smoke rising into the blue sky. It seemed there were many fires blazing.

There were no policemen about but traffic appeared to be running normally. Voices could be heard yelling in the distance. When asked what they were shouting Meyer replied in a low voice. 'Give us guns! Give us guns!'

Strangers started infiltrating into the hotel, but, as January was the busy season when many people who did not live at Shepherd's dropped in for tea or coffee on the terrace nobody took any notice. *Safragis* continued to wait on the tables, they were inured to demonstrations of the same kind in the past and knew this one would be brought under control; but there was an uncanny, electric undertone of intrigue in the air.

The hotel staff carried on as usual with their duties through the morning, and guests collected in the dining-room and went to their customary tables at lunch-time. Towards the end of the meal, Ferrari, the head waiter, came over to Bosshard's table and motioned him to follow. Bosshard left his seat and was led into the service room. Ferrari regarded him anxiously. 'The Parisiana Restaurant is burning,' he said as he opened the window. Bosshard looked out but could see nothing but a welling cloud of thick smoke through which he could hear voices shouting. He walked back to the dining-room and told the Steeles what he had seen. As they were talking together George Sedgwich of the *New York Times* came in. He looked white and serious. He had left the hotel very early in the morning and had been an unwilling witness to the storming of Gropi's, the famous Swiss restaurant. He and an Egyptian colleague had gone in for coffee and sat down at a table when young students rushed in and had begun to break the place up. China and anything that came to hand was thrown through the large plate-glass windows. A youth grabbed Sedgwich's arm and shouted. 'Englishman, down with him!' Before Sedgwich could say anything his companion stood up and shouted. 'He is American—leave him alone.' Sedgwich's attacker hesitated, then dragged Sedgwich's coat off to see if the label read 'Made in England! Luckily the jacket had been tailored in Athens. The assailant was overcome with indecision, then left to join the other hooligans in their destruction. Sedgwich felt it was politic to leave

and was led by his companion through a maze of narrow streets back to Shepherd's.

After luncheon the correspondents went up onto the flat roof of Shepherd's. The spectacle that met their eyes was reminiscent of the war. The section near the St. James restaurant was in flaming ruins. The streets were crowded with a shouting mob. Youths were trying to dismantle a flagpole but, finding it impossible, joined a *mêlée* that stormed the Diana cinema. Seats were thrown out of the windows and piled on a bonfire in the street.

A fire-engine charged onto the scene and the firemen got to work, but the pressure of water from the hoses was too low to make any difference. After a few moments it packed up and drove along Ibrahim Pasha Street.

Mr. Churchill of Thomas Cook's watched the fire-engine coming from the direction of Shepherd's through the shuttered windows of his bedroom in the near-by Victoria Palace.

He had gone to his office near Shepherd's Hotel that morning as usual. When the demonstrators marched past the great plate windows of Thomas Cook's, he had sensed it was no ordinary demonstration. Uneasiness, like a cloud, hung over everything. When lunch-time came he made doubly sure that the doors were locked and made his way to the Victoria Hotel, where he was a resident. He felt unusually depressed as he walked homeward and thought he would forgo his drink in the bar before lunch. When he arrived at the hotel he went straight into the dining-room.

After his meal he strolled into the lobby. An Egyptian acquaintance came up to him and said quietly: 'I think it would be best to remain in your room until this business is over.' He decided to take this advice.

He went to his bedroom on the second floor from where, concealed by the French shutters, he could see the pavement in front of the hotel, though not the actual entrance. He noticed a lad in his teens holding aloft what was without doubt the hotel register; this he tore in half and set alight on the pavement. Crazy youths appeared from the general direction of the front door and added the hotel radio, chairs and sofas. The fire sprang up as the tinder-

dry wood caught. It was at this moment that Churchill saw the fire-engine coming from the direction of Shepherd's Hotel. It did not stop.

He could scarcely believe his eyes when the youths added the hotel's fine Persian carpets to the bonfire. They were the pride of the hotel. A former manager had spent many years collecting them, not in so grandiose a fashion as Charles Bachler, but with the same love and discernment. The carpets of the Middle East are as individual as paintings and, like paintings, they respond to good lighting. At the Victoria the back of each rug was labelled with the number of the room to which it belonged, so that each was placed where the light enhanced the fine designs and colouring.

Churchill was so busy grieving over the burning of the Persian carpets that it was some time before he noticed that mattresses were being added to the fire. The hooligans were upstairs, throwing bedding out of the windows. He wondered what to do. If, by a miracle, things were brought under control, there would be plenty of fire-fighting to be done so he removed his coat and put on an old sports jacket.

There was shouting in the corridor. He went into his private bathroom, dragged a chair over to the door and climbed onto it to look out of the fanlight above. He caught a glimpse of demonstrators at the far end of the passage and decided to make a dash for the roof. He looked round his bedroom for a suitable weapon, then thought it might make him conspicuous so abandoned the idea.

He slowly opened the door and stepped quietly into the corridor, locked the door behind him, put the key in his pocket and ran down the hall towards the staircase leading to the roof. He passed the open doors of rooms in which rioters were pulling out drawers and throwing things about, but they were so engrossed in destruction they failed to notice him.

He reached the staircase and looked up straight into the eyes of a man brandishing a large stick. Churchill swung to one side and under the staircase. The man flung himself down the steps and

Churchill thought his thumping heart would betray him, but his opponent tore down the corridor. Churchill emerged, ran up the stairs and reached the roof without further incident.

The sight that met his gaze was a ghastly one. Everything seemed to be on fire. The only thing to do was to get out of the district—but how?

He retraced his steps down to the corridor and saw the hall-porter leading two German tourists—whom he had met the night before—towards the main staircase. He leant against the wall, closed his eyes, and wondered for a split second what to do. He decided to follow the Germans. He threw his shoulders back and walked briskly behind them. They did not turn round, but the hall-porter, who knew him well, caught a glimpse of him out of the corner of his eye. The porter came to the top of the staircase, paused, and began going down, followed by the two Germans and Churchill bringing up the rear. The porter said loudly in Arabic that the three men following him were German and must be allowed to pass. They went slowly down the staircase.

Once in the lobby, Churchill walked out of the front door and climbed over the terrace into Ibrahim Pasha Street. From the pavement the heat of the fire was terrific; sparks were flying in all directions and the smoke was making people cough. He was surprised to find that the crowd was not hostile. Many people appeared to be merely spectators. By this time he had dropped behind the Germans who went over to a taxi-rank opposite the Luna Park Hotel. They got into a taxi and drove off.

No one took any notice of Churchill. His hair was untidy, he was still wearing his old jacket and he was covered with soot and perspiration. He decided to go to Thomas Cook's office building and let himself in, then walk out by the back entrance and into Shepherd's. Shepherd's would be safe.

He began walking in the right general direction but the press of people was so great that it was difficult to keep going. When, after what seemed an interminable time, he reached the vicinity of Shepherd's, he saw with despair that havoc was being wrought there too. It was no use going farther. Luck was with him because



at that moment he saw a taxi. He ran over to it. The driver looked at him closely, then beckoned him to get in.

'Heliopolis Palace Hotel!' Churchill said. The taxi-driver nodded. Completely exhausted, Churchill sank back in the leather seat as the taxi drove off.

In the meantime everyone at Shepherd's was very worried.

The fire-engine Churchill had glimpsed through his bedroom shutters had been seen a few minutes earlier by Walter Bosshard and the Steeles from Shepherd's roof. Like Churchill, they had tried to pin-point the fires, but, even by plotting them in relation to known landmarks, it was impossible to do so for the black smoke made it difficult to see what was burning and what was not.

Certainly, the Parisiana was gone, that famous eating-place whose speciality had been kebab garnished with chopped parsley and sour cream sauce—where the gourmet used to select his own piece of meat and then watch it sizzling over glowing charcoal, while the Greek chef turned it deftly now and then at exactly the right second. The Bardia was no more. With its all-Arabic variety shows so beloved by generations of Cairenes and so enjoyed by visitors, it would be irreplaceable.

There was some shooting in the vicinity of the hotel and the asphalt roof was getting uncomfortably hot. The correspondents decided to go down and they made their way to Bosshard's room. They went out onto his balcony and watched silently as rioters demolished the show windows, the doors and shutters of the buildings on the opposite side of the street. Suddenly Mrs. Steele said, 'It seems to me I can hear glass breaking below us.' Someone screamed close to the balcony. Arch Steele hurried through Bosshard's room, pulled the door open and stood back quickly as thick, black smoke poured in. 'Esther,' he called to his wife, 'the hotel is on fire! Come quickly this way,' Walter Bosshard hurriedly gathered what was nearest to hand, his typewriter, brief-case, two shirts and an old raincoat, and clutching these under his arms as best he could, he followed the Steeles into the passage. As he closed the door to his room he turned the old-fashioned brass key in the lock and put it in his pocket. It now hangs in a gilt frame

on his drawing-room wall in Switzerland as a last memento of the old Shepheard's Hotel.

The lights were no longer burning in the corridors and from the far end of the dark hall they heard a woman's voice wailing, 'The staircase is on fire, how can I get downstairs?' Bosshard cried out reassuringly that there must be a way through the service exit, and he groped towards it in the dark, when the woman had joined them. Pressing his handkerchief over his mouth against the smoke he led the way down and the little party found themselves in the garden. When their eyes had become accustomed to the light they saw a number of hotel staff hovering about uncertainly, and a small crowd of guests who had gathered under some sheltering trees. Very few had any luggage with them. Steele and his wife could not return to fetch their things from their bedroom on the second floor for it was now ablaze. They learnt that a fire had already been put out in the garden.

The guests were telling each other what had happened. Petrol-soaked rags and a grenade had been thrown into the lobby to set it alight but the flames had been stamped out. The management had moved guests from rooms facing the streets in case other fire-brands were thrown in. All the shutters were closed. The electricity had failed and the people who had gathered in the Moorish Hall had had to grope their way out into the garden.

In the Long Bar nothing had changed—save that Joe was handing out stiff drinks free. He was doing this as imperturbably as the head barman had done on the roof of the Overseas Club in London during the blitz.

The management, as befitted Shepheard's, behaved as if there was no actual danger. Guests were advised to remain near exits and to keep calm. Police headquarters were asked for assistance three times between noon and three o'clock—but none came.

Maids and telephone operators were told to make sure no one remained in the bedrooms. The servants who were not seeing to the wants of guests kept together in quiet groups, or hid in the pantries. There were bloodcurdling yells from a lift-boy when his elevator stuck between two floors, but the mechanism soon righted itself.

An Egyptian guest at Shepherd's had been working in one of the city offices most of the morning and, like so many others, thinking the excited crowds in the streets were only part of a demonstration which would soon be rounded up, returned calmly to the hotel just after midday to wash and pack. Having done this in his bedroom, which overlooked the gardens, he thought he would go somewhere quiet for lunch as there seemed to be an unnecessary din round the hotel.

He returned after a good meal at about 2.30 p.m. and found the crowd getting ugly and the front door and terrace closed. However, he managed to get into the hotel. It was dark inside and he discovered the lifts were no longer working. He started to walk upstairs with the intention of collecting his luggage to go to the station and return to Alexandria where he lived. There was a strong smell of burning and, as he rounded a corner in the staircase, he came upon men with lighted pieces of cotton-waste trying to set fire to carpets and curtains. He judged the situation was getting out of hand and quickly decided to forget his luggage and rushed downstairs to telephone the police. He made his way towards the telephones in the dark, thankful he knew the hotel so well, but his heart sank when he found the lines were out of order and he could get no reply. His eyes had grown accustomed to the obscurity and he made his way to a service door which led into the garden. He saw some other hotel guests there and walked over towards Suzie Solidore, the French actress, whom he knew well. Before he spoke to her something made him look upwards and high above, climbing out of one of the second story windows, he espied another friend gingerly beginning to lower himself down by the aid of some white sheets knotted together. Everyone in the garden was silent as the man continued his dangerous descent. Even as they watched, flames leapt out of the window and licked at the top sheet. It soon caught alight and before the man reached the ground it broke so that he fell. The Egyptian ran forward to help him to his feet. The man had wrenched his back but appeared to have no bones broken.

Leaving his friend in good hands, the Egyptian tried to get out

by the back gate of the garden. He managed to persuade the *Boab* to open it for him and hastily putting on his fez, he found himself near what had been the St. James, but was now a smoking ruin. By this time the other surrounding buildings, as well as the hotel, were on fire but he mingled with the crowd and after some nerve-racking hours managed to make his way to the station.

In the meantime Cairo was aflame. Crowbars were being used to smash in windows. The Chrysler showroom was in ruins, both Groppi's cafés were a shambles. It seemed at one time that the National Hotel would suffer the same fate, but when the rioters gathered before the entrance and began stoning the windows, an Egyptian Army officer came out of the hotel and, holding a small copy of the Koran high above his head assured the mob that there were no Europeans in the building. The crowd gradually dispersed. This young man risked his own life and saved many.

Back at Shepherd's more and more guests were gathering in the garden.

Alfred von Spragen of Radio Hilversum was making a tape-recording in his bedroom about the rioting, when he suddenly noticed smoke seeping under the door. He dashed out into the corridor and ran quickly down the service stairs to the garden.

The guest prima donna of the Italian Opera Company, who had been in Cairo for some days, was awakened from her after-lunch siesta by billowing smoke. She hurriedly pulled on a fur coat over her *négligé*, grabbed her jewel-case and ran down to the garden in her bedroom slippers. After about ten minutes she gave such a piercing yell that people near her thought she had been shot. 'My jewels!' she screamed, 'my jewels!' Instead of bringing down her jewel-case she had brought a large box of Kleenex.

A young American couple standing near Walter Bosshard were very quiet. Large tears rolled down the face of the pretty wife. 'A girl from Texas never cries in public,' her husband said to her softly. She looked at him. 'You are right,' she replied in a small voice, 'for a moment I forgot my birthplace, but I can't help thinking of all the beautiful clothes you bought for me which I shall never wear again.'

An Englishman, Warwick Ronald had just reached the garden in safety. He had been up very early that morning, done business in the city and, feeling tired after a late lunch had determined to take a nap despite the uproar. He went upstairs to his room, undressed and lay down. Loud and savage cries woke him. He glanced at his wrist-watch and saw it was three o'clock. He got up, dressed and looked out of the window. Men were smashing up the grill room and throwing out the musical instruments and chunks of the grand piano. It sounded as if the whole of Shepherd's was being broken up. Smoke was pouring from the grill room and he thought, 'Oh, hell! they are going to burn down Shepherd's.' He picked up his money, air-travel tickets and health certificates, cigarettes and a book. Curiously enough, like many of the other guests, he felt no particular urgency. He carefully shut the window to keep the smoke out, walked out of his bedroom, locked the door and went down the long corridor. It was pitch dark and full of smoke. He made his way to a staircase but found it so hot he had to turn back. No one seemed to be about. He tried to open every door he passed but they were all locked. He could see nothing, the smoke was choking him and his eyes were smarting. He came upon an air-vent, but it seemed to lead nowhere so he walked on down the corridor. He found an unlocked door, went through and discovered himself in a chambermaid's pantry with a window and hand-basin.

He got out of the window onto a small ledge and looked down; there was a drop of some twelve feet onto wire-netting protecting a skylight. No escape that way. He re-entered the pantry, soaked his handkerchief under the tap and put it over his mouth. He slowly opened the door, the smoke was thicker but he forced his way into the corridor again. Flames were actually licking the walls and, for the first time, Warwick Ronald felt a sensation of fear. He looked first up the corridor then down, but could see nothing through the smoke. He decided to walk down the passage and guided himself with one foot on the carpet and the other against the wall. He seemed to be getting nowhere. He tried to break through some of the doors but to no avail. He came upon another air-vent, sat down and pondered what to do.

He decided to explore the air-vent, hoping it was not the one he had tried before. He clambered into it but it led nowhere. He went back to the chambermaid's pantry, peered out of the window again and noticed for the first time a thin gaspipe running along the outside wall to a roof four or five yards away. Praying the pipe would not break and precipitate him into a hole some sixty feet below, Warwick slowly lowered himself out of the window, grasped the gaspipe and went along it hand-over-hand, swinging his body from side to side. Miraculously, it held. He managed to hoist his legs onto the roof and gradually pulled himself up. He was black with soot and drenched with perspiration. He wandered cautiously over the roof, looking for a way down, and finally spied some steel rungs clamped to a wall leading down to the garden. When he had reached the ground, he sat on some dirty steps, unconscious of everyone around him, lit a cigarette and opened his book. He went on reading until he felt the strain of physical effort leave him.

Shepherd's on that momentous day seemed full of newspaper correspondents. Donald Robinson, of the *Reader's Digest*, and his wife escaped from their room by the aid of someone who placed a ladder outside their window so that they could climb down. Ernie Hill of the *Chicago News*, was there with his wife and they were led to safety by an Egyptian film star, raven-haired May Medwar. She led them through a side entrance out of the garden and, talking Arabic loudly all the time, took Mrs. Hill by the arm. With Hill bringing up the rear, she made her way slowly through the excited mob until they found a garage where they managed to hire a car.

An attempt was made to organize the Arab staff at Shepherd's into a living wall to protect the main entrances, but rioters broke through into the burning building.

The hotel was now becoming a raging inferno; pictures, tapestries and irreplaceable carpets were being consumed and the heat was intense, yet youths were still pushing flaming torches through the ground-floor windows to set the curtains alight and the wanton destruction continued.

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. Flames were leaping twenty feet into the air. The falling beams and burning debris made the garden scarcely tenable, yet it seemed more dangerous to mingle with the frantic crowd outside. Relief came at four o'clock. Police officers arrived in two cars to drive the guests to a police station out of harm's way. A ferry service was run between Shepherd's garden and the police station through burning streets. Police guards stood on the running-boards with pistols at the ready. There were no incidents.

As soon as the last guest had reached safety, he and his fellows were joined by police clerks, who helped them make out lists of missing luggage and the names of those who had left Shepherd's by other means. Many had only the clothes they were wearing. Three American missionaries had been lucky. They had arrived just before the trouble began and had not been separated from their belongings.

Through the open door of their room in the prison Shepherd's guests saw many looters being brought in under arrest. Time went by slowly. When night came, rioters formed a cordon outside the building and yelled for the freedom of those in custody. By eight o'clock shooting began in the streets. One troop of soldiers was broken up by rioters, but more poured into the city and gradually an uneasy quiet fell over Cairo.

Meanwhile many of the newspaper correspondents noticed that von Spragen, the Dutch radio commentator, was missing. He had spotted a caravan of cars making for the airport and had asked for a lift—so he told Walter Bosshard some time later—hoping to get a written dispatch off to Radio Hilversum. Luck was with him for he managed to contact a K.L.M. pilot who had just touched down at the airfield from India, and he willingly took the dispatch back to Holland when he left a few minutes later.

At ten o'clock a police chief arrived at the police station and said that the 'west end' of Cairo was free of marauders and a fleet of cars was waiting to transport Shepherd's guests to the Heliopolis Palace Hotel.

Once again a ferry service began, but a far less frightening one

than that of a few hours before. Gangs were still roaming the streets, pillaging and smashing windows, but the violence of the mob had spent itself. A few young hooligans tried to board the cars but were scattered by the speed of the drivers. So fast was the driving that, almost before they knew it, Shephard's guests were being decanted at their destination.

Many people who had fled from Shephard's earlier were in the foyer and there were scenes of joyous reunion. Mr. Churchill from the Victoria Hotel, after what seemed to him the longest day of his life, arrived at the same moment as Mr. Foerster, the manager of Shephard's. The latter, like the captain of a sinking ship, had done all that was humanly possible for the welfare of his guests through the nerve-racking hours. His face was pale and drawn. An anxious friend came up to him. 'I'll get you a drink,' he said solicitously and motioned him to sit down. For the first time during that long, dreadful day Mr. Foerster sat down. Churchill had also met an acquaintance who had gone to get him a drink. Both Foerster's and Churchill's friends arrived back from the bar simultaneously. Too exhausted to speak, the eyes of the weary men met and they drank a silent toast to each other.

The Swiss manager of the Heliopolis, Milo Niederhauser, made everyone welcome and then took his fellow-countryman, Walter Bosshard, off to his private flat where in comfortable surroundings, Bosshard was handed the most welcome whisky and soda he had ever tasted in his life.

The following morning, Bosshard, Sedgwich and Steele took a walk through the ruins of the city. Smouldering rubble, wrecked cars, mounds of glass and charred furniture bore silent witness to the violence of the day before.

Shephard's Hotel, Egypt's most venerable guest-house, was a ghostly shell. Two bodies were found in the ruins; one of a woman who must have lost her senses and locked herself in her room. Balconies, beams and walls hung at crazy angles; strips of crimson carpet lay like open wounds among the wreckage. The dining-room, where Ferrari had waited on guests only the day before, was no more. Sunlight caused the outdoor ballroom's marble floor



to shine through a network of broken branches and fallen trees. One of the Sakkara sphinxes, which had lasted through thousands of years, still survived beside the partially gutted entrance. In the lintel above the doorway the three lotus blossoms, the emblem of Shepherd's Hotel, and the words 'Quis aquam Nili bibit serum bibet' still showed for all to read.

Much was lost that could never be replaced. The autographed photographs in the manager's office of such people as Dr. Beneš, Count Bernadotte and General Smuts, and the portraits and paintings in the hall would never be seen again. The Chubb safe had survived the fire and the Golden Books were still inside. Orders were given that under no circumstances was the safe to be opened till it had cooled down. Although intact, it was still white-hot. Unfortunately either the order was misunderstood, or guests were impatient to claim their jewellery, and the safe was opened while it was still too hot to touch with bare hands. The individual steel boxes and the jewellery they contained remained unharmed, but the sudden inrush of air kindled the Golden Books and turned them to ashes before they could be taken out. The same fate overtook much of the paper money in the Chubb safes at Thomas Cook's. They were opened too quickly and loose papers and documents were instantly ignited. Although partly burned, rolls of paper money—some consisting of £E50 and £E100 notes—were saved. Later the Egyptian Government replaced fragmentary notes, the numbers of which were discernible.

Anxiety over outbreaks of fire remained for some time after the holocaust. Debris caught alight in the ruins of Thomas Cook's when it was being raked over as long as ten days later.

Cairo presented a sorry sight. The buildings in the area surrounded by streets Emad el Dine, Fuad el Awal, Kantaret el Dekka and Ibrahim Pasha, which tourists knew so well, were completely demolished. They included Shepherd's, Thomas Cook's, Victoria Hotel, John Jones, Cicurel, Greco's, Tabarin Cabaret, Diana and Metropole cinemas, all the brasseries in Elfi Bey Street and the large tourist offices facing the Ezbekieh Gardens.

The Turf Club walls still stood but inside it was just a

blackened ruin where many people had lost their lives. On Black Saturday life and death almost depended on the turn of a coin. Mr. Mitchell, a university professor, went to the Turf Club in the morning from the Bab-el-Luk quarter where he had been teaching at the *lycée*. He met Charles Jones of the British Council in the club, who asked him if it was safe to walk in the streets. Mitchell replied that he had seen nothing to worry about, but Mr. Jones was apprehensive and remained in the club, where he later died in the flames. Mr. Mitchell had a drink and then walked back to his flat unscathed.

The Canadian Trade Commissioner, Mr. Boyer, lost his life in the same way. A junior member of the Canadian staff was going to join him for lunch at the Turf Club, but on his way by car, he was waved to a halt by an Egyptian acquaintance who got in beside him and suggested he should follow his directions through some narrow back streets. The Egyptian then told him that much of Cairo was in flames and it would be best to return to his flat, cancel his luncheon by telephone and wait indoors until the rioting had subsided. Fortunately the young man did this and lived to tell the tale.

Many Egyptians saved British lives during the conflagration. One doorman hid a wounded Englishman in his wooden kiosk and, when the victim fainted from loss of blood, carried him to a hospital. Numerous others tried to stop the rioting. One thing seemed certain. Whoever the instigators of Black Saturday were, they gave orders to let everybody get away unhurt and not to take life but to burn everything as thoroughly as possible. Yet, however strict such instructions may be, when the fury of a mob is unleashed anything can happen.

Some months later John Gunter wrote in *Inside Africa*:<sup>1</sup>

Part of the glamour of Cairo went forever when Shepheard's Hotel, with its celebrated Terrace, was burned down in the riots of January 1952.

<sup>1</sup> Hamish Hamilton, London, 1955.

## 17

### The New Shepherd's

AFTER Black Saturday affairs moved quickly in Egypt. King Farouk abdicated and Egypt became a republic. Cairo nursed her wounds while the rest of the country remained quiet. A bloodless revolution had taken place. The new government made reparations for the immediate rebuilding of the centre of Cairo, and almost overnight, it seemed, the work started.

People who had known the city of old, hesitated before returning, but when they did they discovered to their relief that the new buildings were exact replicas of the old. Cairo had not changed.

Groppi's had the same apricot-colour marble walls, the same marble floors, the same black, wrought-iron chandeliers—even the same marble-topped tables with apricot linen cloths. In the entrance hall the delicious cakes and *petits fours* reappeared, the jars of ginger, roseleaf jam and delectable chocolates.

Shops rose over their own ashes, the cinemas likewise. There was one great difference—the large bare site where Shepherd's had stood was now an enormous car-park. Only Kléber's tree remained. The manager, charming and impeccably mannered Antoine Foerster, took over the management of Reid's Hotel in Madeira and Marrot, Shepherd's famed 'Chef de Brigade' went with him. Marrot had succeeded Martin when the latter had fallen incurably ill and committed suicide. Marrot had loved Shepherd's and drove a hard bargain at Reid's where, as well as an astronomical salary, he demanded a villa for his family and three months' vacation a year.

Cairo was not Cairo without Shepherd's—but Shepherd's was to rise again like the phoenix who, when she is consumed by fire, is reborn in a different place with more brilliant plumage.

Shephard's was to reappear on a new site and was to be more grandiose than ever before. The most fashionable part of Cairo had moved towards the Nile, so after much deliberation it was decided to build the new hotel on the east bank next to the Semiramis Hotel.

Plans were made, blueprints drawn, ideas thrashed out, for the hotel had to be worthy of its past. Nearly two years of planning was to follow before the foundation-stone was laid, for the modern Shephard's was to be completely air-conditioned and was to soar nine stories high. There were to be thirty rooms on each floor. Every room was to have a private bathroom with hot, cold and iced water. Telephones were to be installed in the bedrooms together with radio, television and record-playing facilities. There was to be a palatial entrance hall, an open-air terrace, lounges, a bar, a night-club in the basement and a roof garden with a restaurant giving a view over the Nile and out to the pyramids. Shephard's was to have its own special individuality and could not reappear overnight. The planning had to be passed by Monsieur Paul Delacave, managing director of the Egyptian Hotels Limited. His immediate collaborators were Monsieur Joe Renson,<sup>1</sup> the new manager, who was also manager of the Semiramis, and Monsieur George Moens. The old style of Shephard's, so dear to the hearts of travellers from all corners of the globe, was to be wedded to the latest innovations. The architecture and *décor* was to remain Arabic in character. An Egyptian architect Elie Chagoury, who studied art at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, planned the building and collaborated with Pierre Vincent, a Frenchman, over the interior decorating.

In July 1957 the new Shephard's, costing over one million pounds, was opened, and the Egyptian Government issued a special stamp to mark the occasion. The hotel stands, a gleaming blue and white building, on the splendid wide corniche near the Kasr El Nil Bridge, a few steps from the British, American and Canadian Embassies.

As in Charles Baehler's day, expense has not been spared in

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Renson is now Vice-Chairman, and Mr. M. J. Hermand, General Manager.

obtaining the best of everything. Each bedroom cost some £4,500 and the new hotel can offer the acme of luxury and comfort to its guests.

Two Englishmen were present at the historic opening and appropriately enough they were Mr. Stanley Adams, and Mr. Arthur Turner, the chairman and the assistant general manager of Thomas Cook's, the company that added so much to the fame and development of the old hotel.

There is more than a hint of the great mosque of Ibn Tulun in the new hotel with its successive rise in levels, the beautiful arcades with their blue and gold mosaics, the way the individual balconies soar upward and draw the eye to the cornice crowning the top of the building.

As before, Shepherd's is a mixture of the exotic and of luxury. Each floor has moving staircases as well as elevators and the luggage lifts can take up to a ton in weight. The wine cellars are deep and cool, the spacious kitchens boast the latest in cooking equipment. The new cocktail lounge with its soft, leather upholstery, colourful murals and subdued light has already been christened 'The Bar of a Thousand Drinks'! The high window-grills are of delicate stonework tracery superimposed against the sky so that light pours in by day. At night they are illuminated from outside. The Grand Hall is hung with great bronze chandeliers and strewn with lavishly thick Persian rugs; like the Moorish Hall of old, there are shadowy niches where people can dally.

The commercial side is not forgotten; travel agencies, airline offices, flower shops, beauty salons are on the ground floor and anything that can be bought in an American hotel lobby, from books to furniture, can be obtained at Shepherd's. Despite modernity, there is an aura of the Eastern sukh and the atmosphere of 'treasure trove' created by Mansour long ago invades the new jewellery shop and hovers over the antiques, the gems and the beautifully carved alabaster ornaments.

Many changes have taken place in Cairo since the old Shepherd's went and the new Shepherd's was born. The dragoman, so familiar to visitors of the past, has been joined by a new cate-



*Shepherd's Hotel on its new site overlooking the Nile (photograph Egyptian State Tourist Administration)*

*The main staircase in the 'new' Shepherd's Hotel*



*The 'new' Shepherd's Hotel*



*Egyptian stamps marking the opening of Shepherd's, 1957*





*Vice President Boghdadi, Doctor Kayssouny, Doctor Fawzi and their wives attend a Shepherd's banquet*



*Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld leaving the hotel*



*Doctor Ralph Bunch in the entrance hall*

gory of guides—the Tourist Police. These men are unlike any other police in the world. Multilingual, they can cope with any crisis a visitor may have. They iron out difficulties about visas, passports, transport and exchange of money. They know where to go, what to do, what to see and, in the twinkling of an eye, can make arrangements for anything from flying to Luxor to camel-riding in the desert. They will meet trains, aircraft or ships so that the tourist, especially one who travels alone, has the way smoothed before him. The centre of their activities is in Adly Street in Cairo, where a new modern building houses the headquarters of the Egyptian Tourist Bureau. The Tourist Bureau can also supply lady guides or 'hostesses', a group of specially trained girls who speak three languages fluently. Their studies include the history of Egypt from the time of the Pharaohs to the days of Mohammed Ali. Museum tours in the company of these hostesses bring the past back to life for the onlookers. Many of the magnificent palaces and villas of the ex-royal family have been thrown open to the public as museums and their contents are fabulous.

The Salle Orientale has replaced the Scarabe in popularity. It was built in the precincts of Abdin Palace by ex-King Farouk for entertaining his private guests. This small night-club is just inside the ochre-coloured walls surrounding the palace; a red-sanded driveway leads to its entrance. Since the abdication it is one of the most unusual places to dine and dance in the Middle East. Money was no object in its creation but no ordinary management could afford to replace its beautiful, extravagant furnishings.

The visitor enters through a richly carpeted polygonal hall into an L-shaped room of vast proportions. On the right an enormous bar curves like a boomerang. The stools surrounding it are padded in the finest red leather. On the left side are dining-tables facing a sprung dance-floor, which is edged on two sides by a raised dais for the orchestra. Indirect lighting plays over a faintly blue ceiling studded with constellations of silver stars.

However entrancing such places as the Salle Orientale may be, it is Egypt's ancient monuments and the fascination of her past that will always be her main attraction to the traveller for, as



Lawrence himself asserted, there is more to see in Egypt in one year than can be found anywhere else in ten. Excavations continue to bring Pharaonic wonders to light each year.

In 1954, while a road was being built to give tourists direct access to the Pyramid of Cheops, rows of huge blocks were uncovered by the labourers. Each individual stone was over six feet thick, three feet wide and fifteen feet long. One of the blocks was lifted and revealed a gigantic tomb chamber in which two sacred boats, built of the finest Lebanese timber, lay at the bottom. Each boat was one hundred and sixty-two feet long. There was a large gap between the boats and the surface of the tomb showing that grave robbers had been at work centuries before, for at the death of the Pharaoh, when the boats had been lowered into the depths, their decks would have been piled high with treasures for the King's journey through the underworld.

In the same year Doctor Mohammed Zakaria Goneim, principal officer of the Antiquities Service of the Egyptian Government, discovered a hitherto unknown pyramid of the Third Dynasty at Sakkara, close to the famous Step Pyramid of Djoser.

In 1956 the tomb of the First Dynasty Queen, Her-neit was excavated at Sakkara. The central tomb chamber was in two stories but, once again, had been looted in antiquity. The skeleton of a seluki-like dog, who had been buried to accompany his royal mistress through the underworld, was found just inside the entrance to the tomb. Gold and cornelian jewellery and the Queen's drinking-goblet were also unearthed.

From near-by Memphis the enormous statue of Rameses II, hewn from a single block of granite and weighing eighty tons, has been brought to Cairo. In ancient times it stood at the entrance of a temple dedicated to Ptah, now, thousands of years later and in a marvellous state of preservation, it stands in the square before the main station. When it is floodlit at night it resembles one of the Colossi of Memnon come to life. Like the sphinx it stares with indifference over puny man. Its face is turned towards the new Shepherd's.

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